

**WELCOME REMARKS BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR FINANCE, MR THARMAN SHANMUGARATNAM, AT THE OPENING OF THE BLOODBANK@WESTGATE TOWER, 23 JUNE 2015**

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Mr Tee Tua Ba, Chairman of Singapore Red Cross

Dr Mimi Choong, CEO, Health Sciences Authority

Mr Benjamin William, Secretary General, Singapore Red Cross

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to be here today for the opening of the Bloodbank@Westgate Tower, the first of its kind serving the community in the West of Singapore.

**Introduction**

A bit of history is called for, in the spirit of SG50. We have come some way since the Singapore Blood Transfusion Service was started in 1946. It collected 287 units of blood that year. When Singapore obtained self-government in 1959, a big effort was made to boost blood donations by the local population. By 1970, the number of units donated had increased to 35,000. Today, it stands at thrice the number, at 110,000 units annually.

2 But the demand for blood is growing. We are expanding the capacity of the healthcare system to meet new demands - such as in Jurong through the Ng Teng Fong Hospital and Jurong Community Hospital which are opening very soon, and the Pioneer polyclinic which just broke ground last month.

3 Life-saving blood and blood products are critical as we expand these healthcare services. Blood needs are projected to double from the current level by 2030. Blood is needed for patients of all ages. We will have more elderly patients, who are more likely to require blood transfusions, and an increasing number of surgeries and medical treatments requiring blood transfusions too.

### **Moving Ahead**

4 We are transforming the way we reach out to donors. In the early years, blood was collected in glass bottles, and an air-conditioned bus plied the island to make mobile blood collection possible. Today, we **make it easier, safer and more convenient to donate blood.**

5 First, we have a strong **network of partners** who have come together to encourage blood donation. This has helped ensure a reliable supply of blood for patients. The Singapore Red Cross (SRC) has been very active in recruiting blood donors on a voluntary and non-remunerated basis. SRC now uses the social media and campus activities to reach out to more youth. The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) and SRC also hold about 550 blood mobile drives annually, partnering with more than 250 schools, corporate, grassroots and religious organisations.

6 Here in the west, SRC is collaborating with key stakeholders to encourage more to step forward to donate their blood. I am heartened to see grassroots organisations such as those here in Yuhua SMC and Jurong GRC working with the SRC on citizen-led blood donation drives to reach out to residents. 43 corporate organisations, including firms like M1, ExxonMobil and FMC Technologies, have pledged a total of 16,400 units of blood for Bloodbank@Westgate Tower. 42 schools in the West also organise blood donation drives as part of their voluntary work programme. One of our largest school supporters, Nanyang Technological University, organises Vibrant Blood, a public blood donation drive, to increase blood donation during lull periods. I welcome more organisation and companies to come onboard this important endeavour.

7 Second, since 2010, HSA and SRC have embarked on a **decentralisation** of blood donation exercises to make them as convenient and accessible as possible for donors. This new centre, together with the satellite blood donation centres at Dhoby Ghaut, Woodlands and the central blood bank located at Outram, are sited close to where donors live or work. Opening hours and days have been extended to fit donors' schedules. In fact, the two satellites at Dhoby Ghaut and Woodlands together already supply one-third of the national blood supply. By locating the third satellite blood donation site right at the heart of the Jurong Lake District, we aim to ride on the high human traffic in the area.

8 Third, to ensure that its blood products meet international standards and are safe for both donors and patients, HSA has put in place a strong **quality** assurance system supported by stringent blood testing methodologies and the best available technologies.

9 Lastly, blood donation is about the spirit of solidarity and individual giving. There are many outstanding examples here in the West. Just to mention two - Ms Jayamani Overithi, started donating in 1984. At 67, she is no longer donating blood but continues to volunteer regularly at the Bloodbank@Woodlands and at the annual World Blood Donor Day. Mr Aldwin Teo started in 1993, and continues to donate three to four times a year. They inspire others, and I am sure many more in the community, especially the young, will step forward to support blood donation.

## **Conclusion**

10 I wish the Bloodbank@Westgate Tower every success in realising its vision to attract donors near and far, so that we continue to save lives and contribute to a stronger community.