



**MINISTRY OF HEALTH**  
SINGAPORE

**EMBARGOED UNTIL AFTER DELIVERY**  
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**SPEECH BY MR GAN KIM YONG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH, AT WORLD BLOOD DONOR DAY, 10 JUNE 2017, SATURDAY, 10.00 AM AT SINGAPORE SPORTS HUB**

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Mr Tee Tua Ba, Chairman, Singapore Red Cross  
Mr Benjamin William, Secretary General/CEO, Singapore Red Cross  
Dr Mimi Choong, CEO, Health Sciences Authority  
Champion Blood Donors  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is my pleasure to join you at this year's World Blood Donor Day. I am glad that many of you here have made blood donation a part of your life. This takes more than just a big heart. It involves the sacrifice of time, the commitment to an iron-rich diet, and the discipline to visit the blood bank regularly and especially during holiday periods. We would like to thank all 73,500 blood donors in Singapore, and the 1,257 champion blood donors - thank you for sharing your good health with Singapore.

2. Collectively, you have given more than 30,000 patients the gift of life every year. Ms Kymn Yee, who spoke on behalf of the Thalassaemia Society just now, is one of the beneficiaries. She has Thalassaemia, and her bone marrow is unable to produce normal red blood cells. She has been receiving blood transfusions since she was six months old. Today, at 39, she requires a transfusion of three blood units every three weeks. She is also an avid scuba diver, a passionate yoga practitioner and has scaled the Himalayan Mountains not once but twice. She is alive and enjoying her active lifestyle because of donors like you. To raise awareness of, and to help fellow patients and their families manage this hereditary condition, she now serves as the Vice President of the Thalassaemia Society (Singapore).

3. Thalassaemia patients are just one group of people who need regular blood transfusions. Every day, many patients undergo major surgeries and operations and they may each need two to four bags of blood. Accident survivors may need more than six bags of blood for emergency treatment.

4. I would also like to commend the good work of the community bloodmobile organisers and thank them for working tirelessly behind the scenes to support the National Blood Programme. Not only have you helped to ensure a sustainable supply of blood for patients in

Singapore, you have also played a vital role in strengthening community bonding and provided important alternative avenues for many others to donate blood through your efforts.

5. To make blood donation as convenient and accessible as possible, the Health Sciences Authority (HSA) and the Singapore Red Cross (SRC) opened three satellite blood banks, while continuing to organise community blood drives around the island. SRC has also engaged their community partners to adopt blood banks in their vicinity. For example, the Army's combat service and support command, or CSSCOM, and Personnel Hub, have adopted the blood bank at Westgate Tower. CSSCOM's adoption of the blood bank at Westgate has enabled servicemen and women from the Army to give blood regularly together – a group bonded by a shared commitment to saving lives through blood donation. CSSCOM will receive the Bloodmobile Organiser Award later, for having mobilised over 1,000 donations. We hope to see more organisations coming forward to adopt the blood banks and to rally blood donors in their communities to this meaningful cause.

### **Impact of an Ageing Population**

6. Preparedness is key to tackling disease outbreaks and public health emergencies. A robust supply of safe blood is crucial to our preparedness.

7. However, our rapidly ageing population presents two challenges to the National Blood Programme. On one hand, an ageing population means blood demands will increase. The elderly are more likely to develop age-related medical diseases like ischemic heart disease and stroke. The demand for blood to support more medical and surgical procedures may also continue to rise. Unlike younger patients, the elderly may have a lower tolerance for anaemia due to their underlying medical conditions and are more likely to need blood transfusions to prevent complications.

8. On the other hand, our blood donor pool may shrink, as regular donors can no longer give blood if ill health strikes when they get older. In the last five years, an average of about 600 regular donors each year stopped donating due to age-related illnesses.

### **Innovative Approaches to Mobilise Donors**

9. Therefore, we must continue to expand the blood donor pool. The Singapore Red Cross and the Health Sciences Authority have rolled out several initiatives to attract new donors. I participated in one of them last year - the Missing Type campaign. Together with my colleagues at the Ministry, we digitally removed the blood-group letters A, B, and O from our names and posted them on social media. This was a novel way to remind everyone how important blood donation is to patients in need. The campaign generated renewed buzz and awareness in blood donation. Our blood banks registered a 16 per cent increase in blood donations that month, as compared to the same period the year before. I am also heartened by the innovative tools that the Singapore Red Cross has developed, especially those for young people to learn about blood donation, share their stories and recruit their peers as

lifesavers. They include the Red Cross Connection mobile app and the Giveblood.sg microsite - a treasure trove of information and tips to make the act of giving fun.

10. The initiatives and partnerships established by the Health Sciences Authority and Singapore Red Cross bring in some 20,000 new blood donors every year. However, many donors only give blood once a year, or stop giving after a few times. In fact, over 60 per cent of donors who gave blood last year donated only once. You, our champion donors, have played a key role in sustaining our blood supply through your regular donations. We hope that you will continue giving and encourage those around you to step forward to make blood donation a lifelong commitment. This year's international theme for World Blood Donor Day is - "Give blood. Give now. Give often". It reinforces how important it is to give blood regularly, so that we have sufficient blood stocks for daily and emergency use; and continue to provide regular transfusions for our friends in need, like Kymn.

### **Conclusion**

11. The success of our National Blood Programme is only possible with the dedication and strong support of blood donors and bloodmobile organisers like yourselves who are here today. Thank you for answering our call to save lives. We urge you to continue being our blood ambassadors and to inspire many more people to join this lifesaving mission. Happy World Blood Donor Day!

Thank you.