

**Selangor State Research Day  
In conjunction with CRC Selayang New Site Opening Ceremony**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**July 16, 2010**

**Selayang Hospital auditorium**

***By***

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Director General of Health Malaysia**

Distinguished speakers

Participants of the Selangor State Research Day,

May I first of all thank the Organizing Committee & Selayang Hospital; for inviting me to give the keynote address in conjunction with the Opening of the new CRC site at Selayang Hospital.

As medical professionals, we constantly receive updates on new drug formulations, diagnostic techniques, drug delivery systems, dosage regimens, medical devices and therapies. Sadly, most of these significant findings on better and improved therapies reach our shores only after the research & clinical trials have been conducted elsewhere and more often than not, in western countries. Ironically, the history of clinical research actually dates back to Asia, where the first documented mention of clinical trials was described in the *Canon of Medicine*, written by a Persian scientist in 1025. Many of the fundamental principles

stipulated in this initial medical book are still practiced in the conduct of present day clinical trials.

Today, despite western dominance, Asia is becoming the fastest growing region for clinical trials. The growth witnessed in some Asian countries is phenomenal despite only capturing 5.9% of study sites globally. Between the period of 2002 and 2008, the number of international trials in China and India increased 35-fold and 20-fold respectively. Interestingly, between 2002 and 2006, trial sites in Asia had an average growth of 21.3% while regions such as the US and the EU had a drop of 2.9%. We also top the list when it comes to smaller trials; i.e. trials that needed less than 20 sites. Despite these promising outcomes, Asia's performance as a region is as diverse as its cultures. India, Korea, Taiwan and China lead other Asian countries in terms of clinical trials activities. Hong Kong and Singapore are also very popular with the industry. These two countries, however, are limited by their size as they constitute a mere 0.3% of the population in Asia, thus opening up opportunities for Malaysia. With government support, capable investigators, good infrastructure and facilities, research activities in Malaysia should be able to flourish and position itself as one of the region's foremost clinical trial destination.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Clinical research is an essential element of medical research and a vital part of R&D in industry, academic institutions and research

organisations. Although basic research gives us an understanding of the molecular and biological processes of a particular disease, clinical research makes it relevant to healthcare; it guides us to detect, diagnose, monitor and control. Albert Sabin, who discovered the polio vaccine, once said that "*Without the use of animals and human beings, it would have been impossible to acquire the important knowledge needed to prevent much suffering and premature death.*" Thus, the research we undertake is not simply research that glorifies its researchers but research that would add further value to our patients and the public. Our position in MOH is unique and challenging. As MOH officials, we have to provide quality services to the people. Yet, since MOH is now investing more and more in research, we have the added challenge of conducting research as well. Not just any research, I must add but one that will change the diagnostic and treatment landscape, not only in this region but also globally. And in order to do this, we must work hard and beyond the usual routine to equip ourselves with the necessary knowledge and skills and network with great and world renowned researchers and institutes so that we can make a difference and be counted as being amongst the more researchers who can be acknowledged on the international arena.

To do good research, you will of course need funding. But getting the funding does not mean you will be successful researchers. Even with limited funding, you can still do research if you know how to optimise the limited resources that we have. Look at our objectives; what do we hope

to achieve and how we can achieve this with less funding. If history has taught us anything, the great discoveries do not necessarily come from research that cost millions. Most of the research we have done did not cost us much, but they have brought us closer to some form of healthcare solutions. Having said that, we also know clinical research in Malaysia has also the potential to be one of the country's economic drivers, whereby our local pharmaceutical industry play a critical role in attracting foreign investments from major international drug companies.

But as healthcare professionals, how do we merge research culture with the Ministry of Health's core values of care, professionalism and teamwork? If used appropriately and wisely, it is possible that such values can help us in our quests to discover new frontiers in medicine and be in the forefront of scientific breakthroughs. I believe this is possible if we have the passion and the hunger for excellence in what we do. Our research is driven to improve patients' health outcomes, ensure the safety, efficacy and quality of treatments, demonstrate the effectiveness of our healthcare policies and systems as well as solve the health problems of the country. How can we achieve this if we do not have the care, the passion and the drive?

What about instilling professionalism? As researchers, we abide by sets of rules, regulations and guidelines. We practice good ethics and ensure patient confidentiality. We strive to produce good quality work. We make sure that any technology we use must be proven to be safe and the data we compile, must be secure. If we do not practice professionalism in our

work, the research that we do will not mean much. Moreover, unethical research such as those that do not disclose conflicts of interest, manipulate data, or do not reveal negative findings can bring great harm. It just takes one of such research to blemish our reputation, destroy the public's trust and confidence in us and ruin all the good work that we have done.

Lastly, *teamwork*. No researcher is an island and no research idea is generated on its own. Research is a continuum; the work you do today lays the groundwork for future researchers. As a researcher, you cannot know everything about everything and there is no point telling everyone you are the key driver and that others play insignificant roles. Each one has a role to play. One without the other will not produce the desired outcomes. Instead, we all need to be strong in our field and experts in our discipline. Only then can we get the respect of others and strengthen the collaboration.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Just slightly more than a month ago, I officiated the joint conference of the National Institutes of Health Scientific Meeting and the National Conference for Clinical Research. Some of you may have attended this event but for those who did not have the opportunity, allow me to reiterate my message during the conference. Firstly, avoid settling for research that only benefits us locally; we should aim to be world class

movers and shakers and make our presence felt globally. Strive to compete outside your comfort zone, and be a beacon of light for other researchers. Let your work speak for itself; as no good work will go unrecognised. On that aspect, no shoddy work should go unreprimanded either as, just like how good work begets good work, bad work begets bad work.

You have our support as the government is committed to making clinical research an integral part of the country's agenda. RM90 million was allocated for the Ministry of Health under the 9<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan for research activities; a part of which is for cultivating clinical research. We are investing in human capital development as we formulate strategies on training fresh graduates as well improving the research skills of the existing workforce. We are expanding the network of Clinical Research Centres. Just like CRC Selayang Hospital, we have another 16 such centres in Ministry of Health hospitals throughout the country.

When we think of clinical research, what often comes to mind are industry-sponsored clinical trials. Some of us even have the misconception that these company-driven studies are the only form of clinical research. That is far from the truth. Clinical research does not always involve testing of medications or devices. Also, you may not be aware that epidemiological studies are part of clinical research. In such studies, you seek to identify the patterns, causes and control of diseases in certain groups of people. Another important aspect of clinical research is patient registries. Patient registries, the good ones I mean,

are critical as they reveal the natural history of diseases, and with the data available, we can evaluate access to treatment and their resulting health outcomes. This is why the Ministry of Health's Clinical Research Centre has units for epidemiological studies and patients registries. We currently have 36 registries and every major therapeutic area is covered. I would like to take this opportunity to urge Malaysian investigators to initiate their own research. Do not wait for a company or a research institute to approach you. We need original clinical research work that is initiated and conducted by our local investigators to enhance Malaysia's contribution to the clinical evidence base, especially in disease and therapy areas relevant to our population's health. We also need this research to fill critical knowledge gaps relevant to Malaysian public health. The CRC has and will continue to emphasise on investigator-initiated research as we have a Clinical Trial Unit dedicated to help you in your endeavours. Both local and international grants are available for those with original and excellent research proposals. Last year alone, MOH sites were involved in ten internationally funded investigator-initiated research. We have confidence in our investigators and we know that they are capable of producing original work of international standards.

Nothing worthwhile comes without its share of challenges. Advancing clinical research to the next stage may be affected by constraints in funding sources and the increasing costs of research. There is also the problem of gaining public trust in the age where we are bombarded with news on financial conflicts of interest and scientific misconducts. Bad

news has the tendency of travelling faster and reaching more people than good news. Other issues include tensions between the cultural norms of research organisations and industry that may affect growing partnerships and the increasing complexity and legality of retrieving personal health information.

Nevertheless, these challenges can be resolved if we join forces, as collaborative efforts is the way of the future. Researchers, clinical practitioners, regulators and industry players need to come together to advance clinical research in this country. Formulating strategies to *share the burden* can yield high quality research and in some instances at lower cost. The myriad of issues is not unique to Malaysia; these are global problems and therefore, we need to seek alliances at all levels; local, regional and international.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This morning, I am officiating today's event not merely as the Director-General of Health but also because Selayang Hospital has a special place in my heart. Not many know that I still drop by on Fridays for my weekly clinical rounds and see how my staff is doing. As I know what Selayang Hospital is capable of, it is only appropriate that we dedicate a day to research to reflect on our progress and celebrate our achievements. But as excited as we are today, I hope that this initiative does not die off even before it takes root. Sadly, I have seen many such efforts reduced to mere good intentions because of the lack of dedication. Selayang Hospital's Research Day should not become a

flash in a pan or a one-time sensation; it should instead bloom and blossom and trigger similar initiatives in other MOH hospitals. Those who have been long time researchers should take this opportunity to cultivate their passion in future researchers. There is no use reflecting on our past glories, as the research we once did may become obsolete tomorrow. The only way to remain relevant is to pursue new research and expand on existing ones. Action speaks louder than ideas; if you have a research idea, do it now, before someone else beats you to it.

For Selayang Hospital, we have realised its research potential long before today as we established its Clinical Research Centre way back in 2006. Today, we are not only celebrating the birth of a new site but also celebrating a four year anniversary. We have seen steady progress in Selayang, with good work being generated in a variety of clinical fields. And we particularly see great work in research fields such as medicine, ophthalmology, surgery, paediatrics, pharmacy as well as obstetrics and gynaecology. In addition to helping clinicians with their research, CRC Selayang is involved in five patient registries, namely the *National Liver Registry*, *National Renal Registry*, *National Neonatal Registry*, *National Eye Database* and *National Trauma Registry*; and CRC Selayang is the main coordinating site for the liver, neonatal and eye databases. I want to congratulate and thank Dr Goh Pik Pin for her strong leadership in CRC Selayang for the past four years. And to her successor, Dr Wong Hin Seng, thank you for taking up the helm and we welcome you to the CRC's family. I am confident that with CRC's Selayang polished fresh

look and your new leadership, research in this hospital will reach greater heights. And it does help in improving your alphabets!

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

You are really fortunate to be part of this hospital. Selayang Hospital has all the resources and facilities to become a centre for research excellence. The hospital was designed, constructed and equipped for a Total Hospital Information System (T.H.I.S) environment. It is the first hospital in the country to operate with T.H.I.S covering all aspects of its operation. As I mentioned earlier, we have produced some exemplary work but I do not want an institution to be known only for some of its famous researchers. Research should embody the entire institution and research culture should be embedded in its personnel. We should use the advantage and technology that we possess to establish ourselves as credible researchers. Renowned hospitals such as *Cedars-Sinai* is known for its cancer research and *Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children* is credited for its research in childhood illness; while the research work in *John Hopkins Hospital* and *Mayo Clinic* are more diverse. Whichever way we aim for Selayang Hospital to develop its research capacity, it is important that we match our strengths with the available resources and at the same strive for more.

Clinical research is not easy; ask any clinical researcher and the person will tell you that it is daunting. But why do we still do it? Why, do we, after our first research, continue to do the next? We know it is eating into our

time and yet we remain committed. Why? Why are we willing to pursue additional training to be better researchers? Well the answer is “passion”. Some of our clinicians have lost the passion and the zeal. They want to be like the rest. I pity them as they will become just bystanders and be known only for the regular work that they do. They will not be those who can stand up and be counted. The rest of us want to be better doctors, better clinicians, better researchers and better drivers for excellence. It matters to us as we do not want to be complacent as complacency can lead to mediocrity. I have no place in the MOH for those who are mediocre and who have lost the taste for excellence and the battle to make MOH well respected nationally and internationally. Also, for researchers, remember, after doing the research, you must publish or be prepared to perish. The journey to become a published researcher is long, but it is a feat that you do not have to endure alone. The Ministry, through CRC and specifically CRC Hospital Selayang, is there to support you.

To the faculty and participants; thank you for being part of this Research Day and I believe you will benefit from the programme prepared. To CRC Hospital Selayang, congratulations on your new site; I am confident that you are ready for bigger and better things. And I look forward to read more about your research soon. As said by Clint Eastwood, ‘Make my Day’...

Dengan lafaz “*Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*”, I hereby declare the ***Selangor State Research Day in conjunction with CRC Selayang New Site Opening Ceremony*** open.

Thank you.