OPENING ADDRESS BY DR HAN TIERU
WHO REPRESENTATIVE IN MALAYSIA, BRUNEI DARUSSALAM & SINGAPORE

AT THE 3RD WHO QUALITY MANAGEMENT TRAINING COURSE
ON BLOOD TRANSFUSION SERVICES IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC REGION

AT 9AM, MONDAY, 4 OCTOBER 2004
AT AUDITORIUM, HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY

Honourable Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health & Ministry of Community Development, Youth & Sports;

Dr Tan Chor Hiang, Chief Executive Officer, Health Sciences Authority;

Dr Diana Teo, Director, Centre for Transfusion Medicine, Health Sciences Authority;

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of WHO and our Regional Director, Dr Shigeru Omi, I am very pleased to be here to welcome you to the WHO advanced regional quality management training course on blood transfusion services, which is being held in Singapore through the joint efforts of the Singapore Government, the Centre for Transfusion Medicine of Health Sciences Authority and WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Government of Singapore for providing generous support for this advanced regional quality management training course and for two regional courses in previous years. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to Dr Diana Teo, Director of the Centre for Transfusion Medicine at Health Sciences Authority and her team for their strenuous efforts in organising and making this training course possible.
Blood transfusion is an important medical intervention as well as a well-described mode of transmission of diseases. The increased awareness of the possibility of transmitting diseases such as HIV/AIDS and the various forms of hepatitis has elevated the matter of the proper collection, screening and use of blood into the realm of public health. Ensuring the safe and secure supply of blood and blood products is thus regarded as an important public health responsibility of every national government.

In the wake of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, a great deal of enthusiasm was generated for providing safe blood. Many countries have sought to protect recipients through regular, constructive inspections and the licensure of blood transfusion service premises and operations. More and more countries are also taking great efforts to have all blood come from voluntary non-remunerated blood donors.

Needless to say, these blood safety measures cannot be effective without the development and institutionalisation of a robust quality management system. In fact, stricter legislation and regulation on blood transfusion services have led many countries to model their quality systems on pharmaceutical models rather than on the previous professional-based approach.

In a voluntary donation system, we cannot overemphasize the essential significance of a quality management system in the blood transfusion services that integrated continuous improvement mechanisms in sustaining satisfaction and confidence of the blood donor and the general public and thus the development and expansion of the voluntary blood donor pools, which is crucial for a safe and secure blood supply.
The recent development of vigilance schemes in many developed countries reminds us that our quality system needs to be broadened to further improve transfusion safety and to prepare our system to respond in a timely manner to any newly emerging blood safety threat.

Due to the significant role of quality management in ensuring safe blood supply, the WHO quality management project (QMP) was launched in 2000 as a cornerstone of WHO’s goal to achieve a safe and adequate global supply of blood. During the regional advocacy meeting of directors and regional facilitators in Singapore in 2001, QMP was endorsed by the participants and a recommendation was made to WHO to support the implementation of the project in the member countries. Since then, there has been significant progress.

- Two regional quality management training (QMT) courses have been organized with the support of the Singapore Government and the Centre for Transfusion Medicine, Health Sciences Authority. To date, 13 countries have begun to implement the WHO QMP.

- Many participants of the regional QMT courses have become facilitators for their national QMT courses and have been playing important roles in disseminating the concept of modern quality management in their countries. In China, for example, more than 400 quality managers across the country have been trained through five national and numerous provincial training courses. The WHO QMP serves to support the government’s huge investment in upgrading the blood services facilities across the country.

- An active network among the QMT participants and facilitators has been established in the Pacific, through the Secretariat of the Pacific Community LabNet system. This network plays a critical role in creating a culture of quality and facilitating information exchange among blood transfusion services and laboratory staff.
The External Quality Management Scheme (EQAS), run by two WHO collaborating centres, continues to play an important role in monitoring the quality of laboratory screening for HIV and other transfusion transmissible infections. It also educates the staff of the participating laboratories and initiates quality improvement activities.

With all these progresses, I wish I could say that our targets have been met. However, we have to admit that they have not. More needs to be done to make the WHO quality management project a real success in all the Member States. Even for those blood transfusion services where a quality management system has already been established, there is always a need to make compliance with quality standards and continuous improvement embedded in the culture of blood transfusion services. We must also not forget that the ultimate goal of blood safety is the sufficiency and availability of blood in order to treat patients in a timely manner and with the greatest safety and quality possible. We still have a long way to go to reach this goal.

And this is indeed why we are here again. I hope that all of you will make the utmost use of these two weeks by exchanging knowledge as well as the experience that will contribute to the further development of the quality management in your blood transfusion services. Looking at the comprehensive itinerary, I am convinced that you will benefit a great deal from this advanced training course. I am sure this training course will also be another great opportunity to further strengthen the network among the participants and facilitators in the Region.

Last but not least, to those experts who are serving as facilitators for this training course, and who have facilitated the previous two training courses, I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for what you have done for WHO and the Member States. I know that your great enthusiasm and valuable assistance both during and after the training course have inspired many participants to persevere in putting into practice in their own blood transfusion services what they have learned here in Singapore.
I wish both the trainers and the trainees a successful and enjoyable course.

Thank you very much.