

SPEECH BY MR ONG YE KUNG, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, AT WORLD BLOOD DONOR DAY, SATURDAY, 23 JUNE 2018

1 I am happy to join you today in this year's World Blood Donor Day celebrations.

2 This year, we applaud more than 73,000 blood donors who donated blood in 2017. More than 1,700 of them achieved key donation milestones, including 21 donors who made their 200th donation. Through their dedication and commitment to blood donation, thousands of lives have been saved, families united, and communities strengthened. My own loved ones have benefited greatly from blood donation. From the bottom of my heart, I would like to personally thank all of you. Last year alone, more than 32,000 patients received lifesaving blood transfusions. Please join me to express our gratitude to their contribution.

3 I would also like to commend the contributions made by the many bloodmobile organisers supporting the National Blood Programme. It takes a lot of time, effort, and resources to organise a blood donation drive, from mobilising donors and volunteers, to cultivating an ethos of blood donation within organisations and the community. Thank you too.

4 Donating blood is fundamentally a gift of life. It provides a lifeline for many patients with diverse medical conditions. This includes patients undergoing organ transplants, like Mr Athinarayanan and Mr Harols Wee, whose stories you have just heard.

5 The community of blood donors comprises people of different backgrounds, beliefs and circumstances. Many started donating blood while in schools and in army camps alongside their peers. Others were introduced to blood donation through family members.

6 One such person is Wong Jun Sheng. On his 16th birthday, he received a signed consent form from his father to donate blood – who is himself a champion donor. Jun Sheng, whose brother had benefited from blood donation when he was undergoing treatment for leukaemia, felt that donating blood is a good way to give back to society.

7 On a lighter note, blood donation is also a good way to find a life partner. Two young donors who went to Bloodbank@Dhoby Ghaut on their first date in 2013 celebrated their wedding last year, and had their bridal photoshoot at the very same blood bank.

8 Our youths are becoming more socially conscious and doing more for the community and to help others. And they have adopted blood donation as one of their worthy causes, and I believe there is great potential for youth-led advocacy in leading the National Blood Programme. That is why the Ministry of Education has been partnering the Singapore Red Cross to encourage more youths to donate blood. But we do have a challenge - an ageing society. As people get older, they could fall sick more often, and might require more blood donation. We also have falling birth rates, which means we have fewer young people. This inverted pyramid causes some

CHECKED AGAINST DELIVERY

challenges. I was also told that what is needed is consistent and regular blood donation, rather than ups and downs in supply.

9 As part of the Values-In-Action programme in schools, our students learn about blood donation and how they can contribute to the cause. Last year, some schools also partnered Singapore Red Cross to perform skits and organise talks on blood donation and volunteerism during assembly. Schools also organise more than 100 blood donation drives each year.

10 In the community, partners like Taman Jurong CC's Youth Executive Committee has taken the lead to organise blood donation drives. They have been doing so since 2008, involving youth volunteers from neighbouring schools such as Yuan Ching Secondary, Jurong Secondary, River Valley High, Hua Yi Secondary and Bukit Panjang Government High, whose students helped out by distributing flyers, engaging residents, and promoting blood donation through social media. We also see similar participation from institutes of higher learning such as NTU, NUS and Nanyang Polytechnic.

11 Partly because of their efforts, our overall donor population has grown by over 20% in the last 10 years. For those of you who are not part of any community club or school, you can still play a part simply by sharing the story of your own blood donation journey with those around you. Or take it one step further and invite family members, friends and colleagues from your workplace along the next time you go for a donation. By sharing your experience of blood donation, you help to nurture a shared commitment to saving lives across generations.

12 Thank you, and happy World Blood Donor Day.