

**SPEECH BY
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
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**AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
8TH BORNEO DENTAL CONGRESS & TRADE EXHIBITION
THEME : “REDEFINING IMPOSSIBLE”**

**24 MARCH 2018
PULLMAN HOTEL, KUCHING**

OPENING REMARKS

1. I am indeed honoured to be invited here today to launch the 8th Borneo Dental Congress & Trade Exhibition and I am delighted to be amongst a large gathering of dental professionals - dental specialists, dental surgeons, oral health doctors and people associated with dental health care and industries.
2. I am not a dental professional and I am not going to talk to you about things that you know best. But I may be able to share with you the direction we are going as far as our economy is concerned in the next decade or so and beyond. And you may wonder why I need to dwell on things economic among dental professionals.

**PRIVATE DENTAL HEALTHCARE &
THE POTENTIALS**

3. In private healthcare, Kuching started with Normah Specialists Hospital which was later joined by three other private hospitals. As time goes, Healthcare became popular with many people outside Kuching especially those from West Kalimantan who came over to seek a reasonably good healthcare services in Kuching. The people from West Kalimantan came by road via Tebedu while some may be flying from Pontianak to Kuching. The industry could be bigger if there is an easy access, by air or overland, to tap the market potentials in other big towns in Kalimantan like Balikpapan and Samarinda, and even to other towns outside Kalimantan.
4. Of course the health care services also benefited other people in Kuching who provided the supporting services like transport and accommodation. The health care services became quite an industry by itself in Kuching.
5. I believe that the dental healthcare services can be developed in the same manner in Kuching to tap the potentials of other markets outside Sarawak. Our population

of about 3 million is small and it would not be able to allow the industry to grow beyond the market and spending potentials of 3 million people.

6. If Sarawak's dental healthcare wants to grow, it has to look at other markets outside Sarawak much like the general healthcare services and the food sector. Three 3 million Sarawakians can only eat so much but the 3 billion people outside there in the whole of Asia can eat much, much more and that is the market of our food products. Likewise, 3 million people have only 6 million sets of teeth but if we can explore and capture the markets outside Sarawak, of course you will more than 6 million sets of teeth to care for. I think that is not impossible to achieve if our dental services can build its reputation in order to convince the market much like our healthcare services.

WIDER AIR CONNECTIVITY VITAL

7. Of course we need connectivity before people can come to Sarawak. Besides road connectivity we need wider air connectivity with other places outside Sarawak. We are negotiating with Air Asia to set up a low cost air career terminal in Kuching so that we can connect Kuching and Sarawak with other important cities in the region. Air Asia is planning to set up a LCCT terminal in Kuching and we want to negotiate with Air Asia to ensure a win-win situation for both parties. With wider air connectivity we can connect with the potential markets while Air Asia continues its expansion.
8. Afterall, Indonesians in Sumatera are willing to fly to places like Penang and Malacca to get quality healthcare services in these places. I don't see much reason why those in Kalimantan cannot fly to Kuching to get quality dental healthcare if we can make it available to them.

THE DIGITAL PLATFORMS & INNOVATION

9. I believe that to be able to sell our products and services to other people outside Sarawak much like Jack Ma selling through Ali Baba is no longer a farfetched idea for Sarawak anymore. The digital platforms have made products and services promotion, purchase and payment so much easier now.
10. I was in Singapore recently and we are trying to collaborate with Singapore to come up with up a seamless mode of payment via Sarawakpay and Singapore Net. With Bank Negara approval this kind of arrangement would enable Sarawakians and Singaporeans to transact cashless payments seamlessly. We also can explore the same kind of arrangement in the future with Kalimantan through Go Jek, Indonesia's digital payment application, that should be able to give one good reason why people from Kalimantan like to come to Kuching to get dental treatment and other services.
11. If we can be a bit more innovative with our dental products and services, I believe there is every reason for people to come to Sarawak to get whatever that needs to be done be done in Kuching or other places in Sarawak. The "One Day Full Dentures" innovation is one such innovation that can attract people to come over here. **Dr Tay Keng Kiong** who has come up with the award-winning denture making technique really has redefined the impossible that can help to "sell" Sarawak. From the normal at least 5 visits are required for making a new set of

dentures reduced to just one (1) day is the sort of innovation that can put Sarawak on the radar of people wishing to get their dentures done quickly while enjoying the colours and beauty of Kuching.

PUBLIC DENTAL HEALTHCARE IN SARAWAK

12. I have talked about the potentials of selling our dental services to people in Sarawak and those outside Sarawak in line with the development of Sarawak as a digital economy. But we must not forget about the need to provide dental healthcare to our *rakyat* who do not the means to get private dental healthcare and this is the responsibility of the government. The country has come a long way from the early days of bread-and butter dentistry to specialised oral health care. Improving the quality of life through better oral health can be realised if we all work together to improve the oral health of the people through raising standards of care.
13. In this regard, I am happy to mention that the Sarawak Health Department has made tremendous efforts to improve the quality of life of the people in Sarawak through the continuous improvement of oral healthcare delivery, in addition to other developments in healthcare.
14. I wish to commend the Sarawak Health Department for their relentless efforts in pursuing the accessibility of oral healthcare for the *rakyat*. We have recently seen more new dental clinics being set up in Sarawak such as Klinik Pergigian Petra Jaya and the establishment of Dental Clinics at the Urban Transformation Centre (UTC) in Kuching, Sibujaya and Miri in 2016. I am also pleased to note that the Dental Clinic in Bau which was approved under the 10th Malaysia Plan, has been operating since 2016. This single-storey building serves a population of more than 54,000 people in Bau district. In addition to this, another Dental Clinic for the population in Sibujaya was established in Sibujaya in 2016.
15. The Rural Transformation Centre (RTC) in Bekenu, Miri has also been operating since 2014, serving a population of over 10,000. Additionally, the RTC in Mid-Layar, Betong was also operational in 2016, serving a population of 7,900. Currently, we have 36 government dental clinics in Sarawak providing primary oral healthcare services to the general public. The percentage of dental clinics providing outpatients services everyday has increased from 19% in year 2011 to 100% since last year.
16. This is a remarkable achievement! In terms of specialist services, more dental specialist clinics in different disciplines are now available throughout the state. The Department is currently pursuing the development of another 6 dental clinics in the rural parts of Sarawak under the 11th Malaysia Plan. These clinics will further increase the accessibility of oral healthcare to our population in Asajaya, Kabong, Pusa, Jepak, Sg. Asap and Brang Bayur.
17. For other districts without dental clinics, outreach programmes has been growing continuously in number, frequency and the duration of each visit. We have also been actively involved in various National Blue Ocean Strategies (NBOS) especially NBOS 6 and 7 in providing services to the *rakyat* and reaching the previously unreachable.

18. We have also outreach programme to serve the Penan community in Sarawak. The objective of this Penan Outreach Programme is to improve the oral health status of the Penan community by increasing access to oral health care. I am happy to mention that we have been actively providing oral health care to this community in 4 Divisions, namely Miri, Bintulu, Limbang and Kapit despite the difficulty and challenges in accessing some of the areas in the interior with the rough geographical terrain and the limited amenities available such as water supply in certain areas. Under the Penan Outreach Programme, in 2016, out of a total of 2,500 attendees, about 50% were Penans. While in the year 2017, out of the 4,000 attendees, about one third were Penans.

CONCLUSION

19. We have achieved much in bringing oral health and improving the quality of life for the people in this country. In fact, Dentistry has come a long way from its humble beginnings, evolving into patient care that is highly sophisticated, technologically advanced and patient-focused - really redefining the term impossible.
20. I hope that dental professionals in both the public and private sectors would continue to work hand in hand to help Malaysia realise its goal of being a developed nation by 2020 where high quality patient care services are delivered. There is definitely a trend in public-private partnership approaches in the healthcare sector and we support this.
21. With these remarks, I am please to officially declare open The 8th Borneo Dental Congress 2018. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Malaysian Dental Association Eastern Zone for successfully organizing this event. I hope you will have a fruitful exchange of ideas and gain as much information and updates throughout this congress.
22. Sekian, terima kasih.