Opening address by the Minister for Health at Symposium on person-centred care at the Seychelles Institute of Teacher Education, Friday 15 July 2016

I bring the full endorsement of the government of Seychelles as we embark on this crucial symposium on person-centered care. I also bring back to the fore the tenacity with which Ministers after Ministers of Health have been imploring you, health care professionals, to improve the quality of your care, to show more compassion, to improve the dated appointment system and to cut short the long waiting lists for all our patients. These are all core actions, in a way that really matters, if we really want to model our care on the person.

In his message to the nurses on the 12th May of this year (Nurses Day), the President himself praised the initiatives of the Ministry of Health to bring “the person” back into the centre of our care. “Above all,” he said, “Communicate!”

The well-being and health of the Seychellois people are at the centre of our social and economic development. This has always been “the reason to be” of our Government. In 1978 we adopted the principle of health for all and health by all. In 2015 we added the principle of Health in All as an integral part of our national health policy, affirming our conviction that people’s health lies at the heart of national development. This was also an acceptance of the challenge by all sectors of government that the promotion and protection of health must be fundamental considerations in all policy and strategic
decisions. Through our partnerships with non-governmental sectors, we have invited others to join in this challenge. The Health of Our Nation movement underlines this commitment by proposing that the health status of our people is a measure of the success of our developmental efforts.

The people-centred approach to health is firmly positioned in our policy objectives and strategic directives. Whether we are pursuing public health initiatives or clinical interventions, this outlook guides our investments and services. In implementing this approach we must maintain the broad view of population health while focusing on the specifics of the health needs of the individual and the family. Thus, our people-centred framework must translate into person-centred health care. The successful implementation of our broad policies and strategies must be judged to a large extent on how well our efforts satisfy the needs of our citizens.

Person-centred health care is, however, much more than ensuring that our services are directed at meeting the needs of individuals who use them. It is important to understand that the person is a full participant in the process of designing and implementing health care. Health care is not just about providing services. Our approach must recognise the fundamental rights of all individuals as well as the social nature of health and the cultural dimensions of care. This understanding is as important for the policy makers and managers as it is for the professionals engaged in public health and clinical practice.
When we launched “My Health, My Responsibility” as a campaign, within the Health of Our Nation movement, we proposed three components as fundamentally important for truly ensuring the engagement of citizens in health. Firstly, motivating individuals to take responsibility for their health, as enshrined in our Constitution. Secondly, to change the nature of the interaction between users and providers of health care services. And thirdly, to make changes in the environment to support better health which, in other words, is about addressing the social determinants of health. We have achieved much in addressing the first issue and we are taking many steps, including the recent adoption of the National NCD Strategy, to act of the third component.

The second component, improving the interaction between users and providers, between clients and health professionals, between patients and clinicians, is the focus of our efforts this year to promote person-centred care. In May the Ministry hosted a seminar on patient-centred care to launch an examination of the concept and our practices, in preparation for today’s symposium. We know that person-centred care is what we should practice. We assume that our care services are patient-centred. After all, this is how our health professionals are trained. And yet, this short half-day seminar showed us that too often our practice is far from what we believe it to be. There is no denying our successes and the good intentions of our professionals. But clearly, there remains the need to further explore the concepts and the practices, evaluate our achievements, see where we fall short, and resolve to do well more consistently.
When I launched the Health of Our Nation just over two years ago, I also noted the Ministry’s plan to develop a Seychelles Charter for Health. I am pleased to see that the draft Charter is on the agenda of this symposium. I believe that the Charter can become part of our determination to promote and sustain person-centred health care. I trust that you will give it the necessary attention in your deliberations so that, before the end of this year, it can be adopted as an expression of our nation’s commitment to its health.

I have been informed of the enthusiastic response of professionals to this symposium and I am pleased that so many of you are participating over the next two days. I am particularly pleased to welcome the international facilitators and to assure you that your presence here has been awaited with great anticipation. I know that we all look forward to benefiting from your experience and knowledge. It is also very encouraging to note the close collaboration of our three professional Councils and I congratulate you for this important initiative. As ever, the World Health Organization is our steadfast partner and I thank you for, once again, supporting us in our efforts to strengthen our health care services.

I know that there are many interesting topics on your programme. Over the next two days you will share experience and you will no doubt gain greater knowledge and awareness. It is my hope that the impact will last well beyond the symposium. On behalf of all patients, clients and colleagues who will
benefit from the experience, knowledge and awareness you gain, I thank you all.

It is now my pleasure to declare the symposium on person-centred care open.