

**Talking points of  
Dr Myint Htwe, Union Minister for Health and Sports  
17<sup>th</sup> Asian Spinal Cord Network Congress  
in conjunction with  
15<sup>th</sup> Myanmar Rehabilitation Medicine Conference**

**Taw Win Garden Hotel, Yangon.**

**10<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2018**

Mingalarbar!

1. Good morning to the distinguished guests present here attending the 17<sup>th</sup> Asian Spinal Cord Network (ASCoN) Congress which is being held in conjunction with 15<sup>th</sup> Myanmar Rehabilitation Medicine Conference.
2. It is my distinct privilege and honor to deliver the opening remarks at this august gathering of professionals coming from different parts of the world, far and near, and also from my country.
3. I would like to congratulate the Myanmar Society of Rehabilitation Medicine and ASCoN for jointly organizing this congress for the very first time in Myanmar.
4. When I did a quick review of the agenda of the congress, it is very heartening to note that the whole spectrum of preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative aspects are covered. This is very unique for this congress.

5. The topics to be presented and discussed are also of great importance and extremely useful to the field of spinal cord injuries and rehabilitation.
6. As the congress is being held in Myanmar, our upcoming professionals working in this domain should make the most out of this congress.
7. This congress would definitely strengthen the network of professionals working in the field of rehabilitation medicines as well as personal communication among the professionals for further sharing and expanding the knowledge horizon in this domain of rehabilitation medicine i.e., sharing of state-of-the-art techniques in rehabilitation medicine.
8. Having gone through the short CV of the speakers, I noticed that speakers are no doubt well experienced in their respective technical areas and I personally want to convey my special appreciation for coming here and for sharing their hard earned experience among the circle of this profession.
9. I would like to draw your kind attention to the topics to be presented by key note speakers Dr. H S Chhabra and Dr. Alarcos Cieza respectively, i.e., *“Past, Present and Future of ASCoN”* and *“Rehabilitation: The Health Strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Really”*?
10. It will give deep thoughts for us to use in shaping our future directions and road map if we really want to make progress in this technical domain.

11. As a medical professional, I noticed that the 15 topics of the symposia are also extremely useful and important for day to day use for different categories of professionals involved in management of spinal cord injuries.
12. If possible, the congress proceedings should be prepared comprehensively and distribute to all those who work in this domain in Myanmar and especially for those who could not attend the congress due to several reasons. The MoHS will provide funding support to produce it, if required.
13. I would also urge the professors concerned with this technical domain to submit to me what we need to do in Myanmar in a step-wise and phase-wise manner for further promoting this domain. I and my senior staff will accord serious attention to this.
14. As a medical professional and in the interest of promoting our upcoming young professionals, I like the agenda item “Oral Presentation Competition”. This can stimulate and create interest and nurture professional growth in this domain. This idea of “Oral Presentation and Competition” should be a regular agenda item for all symposia or congresses or big technical events held in my country.
15. If we really want to promote rehabilitation medicine, we need to review to what extent this subject of physical and rehabilitation medicine is included in the curriculum

of medical schools. We should do a quick and dirty analysis on this aspect.

16. Furthermore, I could not resist in mentioning to congratulate the organizers for outlining such a wonderful and encompassing agenda for the congress. Even I should say that final MBBS students should be invited to attend the congress for creating interest and for pursuing their career in this domain. This rehabilitation field is also essential for stroke and many CNS disorders. We need many technical professionals in this rehabilitation domain.
17. I am fully confident that this congress will be very fruitful and benefitting all the participants.
18. Spinal Cord Injury is one of the commonest causes of mortality, and morbidity around the world especially with increasing incidence of accidents of all types happening all over the world.
19. We all are aware that spinal cord injury (SCI) is a medically complex and highly likely to result in life disrupting conditions.
20. The best way to reduce the number of spinal cord injuries is to reduce the number of traffic and household accidents through implementation of sound public health strategies, interventions and approaches. We are now doing it by all ways and means and with whatever limited resources that are available in my country.

21. In fact, it is a public health problem and a human right challenge facing us.
22. Spinal cord injury is a kind of disabling injury with many negative implications to activities of daily living (ADL) and posing a big stress to the family members. Special assistance requires additional financial burden to the family.
23. As a matter of fact, the MoHS is also promoting disability friendly hospitals as the first phase.
24. It not only can lead to damage or loss of sensation and motor function, but also may lead to multiple organ dysfunctions. Hence, the importance of this subject does not need to be elaborated.
25. Despite the availability of some treatment methods such as stem cell therapy, there is no effective measure to cure SCI completely as yet.
26. Moreover, its expensive treatment cost, long term care, and the loss of labor force always bring great burden to the individual and family, and also bring a heavy burden on the society at large and to the country.
27. We can even develop a generic treatment road map or individual specific treatment road map for those patients who suffered from spinal cord injury.
28. Accordingly, a coordinated multisystem approach and total care of patients must be taken into consideration to treat the injury itself and the accompanying complications.

29. In other words, collective and coordinated works of public health specialists, social scientists, orthopedic surgeons, neurosurgeons, rehabilitative medicine specialists, physiotherapists, rehabilitation nurses, occupational therapists, psychiatrists, researchers are required in order to tackle this spinal cord injury holistically and its related conditions.
30. I am of the opinion that we need to further promote and give special attention to strengthen Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine Department in my country as an urgent need of the time.
31. For that matter, may I also request the professionals attending this congress to share newer thoughts and ideas based on your wide array of experience in your country to our Society of Rehabilitation Medicine.
32. Internationally, available data also show an increasing trend in the incidence of traumatic SCI (TSCI) as well as non-traumatic SCI. This non-traumatic SCI, as well as stroke, is a matter of upcoming importance in my country.
33. Some studies revealed that people with SCI die earlier by 2 to 5 times more than those people without SCI.
34. As we all are aware that rehabilitation is one of the four main pillars of medical care, i.e., promotive, preventive, curative, and rehabilitative.

35. Proper and scientific approach to rehabilitation is one of the predictors and very important for spinal cord injury patients for improving their quality of life.
36. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) article 26, providing habilitation and rehabilitation services to “enable persons with disabilities to attain and maintain maximum independence, full physical, mental, social and vocational ability, and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life”.
37. Myanmar Rehabilitation Medicine society, with technical support from Livability, UK and WHO, also set an objective in *“the National Rehabilitation Strategic and Implementation Framework Consensus Workshop”*; i.e., to strengthen the quality and coverage of services for people with SCI in Myanmar through establishment of a National SCI model programme in Myanmar and coordinated pathway for people with SCI in cooperating pre- hospital, acute care, post-acute medical care and rehabilitation.
38. I am delighted that this ASCoN congress will be a good educational platform to develop SCI services at all levels of the health care delivery system in all member countries, and supported by many other educational organizations and development partners such as International Spinal Cord Society (ISCoS), Asian Spinal

Cord Network (ASCoN), Livability UK, Spirits, and Humanity and Inclusive (HI).

39. Our Ministry of Health and Sports strongly support spinal cord injury management for orthopedic and rehabilitation as a main stream activity in the health care delivery system.
40. We should also not lose sight of the fact that family members of the spinal cord injured patients should also be health educated for simple management and care for the patients. This is as equally as important as acute care of the patients in the hospital or rehabilitation ward.
41. Here, simple management and care should also include psychological perspectives to boost the morale of the patient. Without that, the patient will run the downhill course in no time. Hence the importance of counselling and psychological support by the family members could not be over emphasized.
42. This home care would be successful if the care givers assume the notion that “If I were the patient, how I would like to be cared for”.
43. All line of care must be based on the ethical principles and perspective and also along the notion of “the human right aspects of the patient”.
44. This congress highlights the importance of involvement of a wide range of professionals in delivering total care service to the patients with spinal cord injury to meet



the need and to optimize function and improve the quality of life of all those who suffered from spinal cord injury.

45. Thus, it leads to the theme *“Total Care of Spinal Cord Injury through Harmonization of Rehabilitation, Technology and Community Empowerment”*.

46. May this event further empower the medical professionals from local as well as from regional and international societies to take great steps in terms of improving management of spinal cord injury in Asia and beyond.

47. I wish you all have a productive, fruitful and meaningful congress.