

1987



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Letter to Mr Khaw Boon Wan, Executive Director, National University Hospital

1 June 1987

*Mr Khaw Boon Wan
Executive Director, NUH*

Re: National Eye Institute

I am attaching 3 documents:

- (i) the financial report (Appendix A)*
- (ii) the background information (Appendix B)*
- (iii) a pamphlet prepared 2 years ago (Appendix C)*

I would like to set out the outline of my thoughts regarding the Institute in relation to the Department of Ophthalmology at National University Hospital.

Dr Arthur Lim

Appendix B

Proposal For The National Eye Institute: Background Information

The idea of the National Eye Institute (NEI) was mooted as far back as 1981, when the Singapore Eye Foundation was in the process of being set up. From 1983, discussions on the concept of the NEI were actively taking place between the Ministry of Health and Dr Arthur Lim, the outcome being the MOH Report put out in early 1986. Since then, there have been further meetings and negotiations, but to date, an in-principle approval is still wanting.

The Economic Committee emphasised Singapore's need to realise its full potential of developing into a centre of medical excellence through the setting up of specialty institutes to concentrate resources and expertise. However, lack of decisive action is causing Singapore's competitiveness as a major centre of excellence to be eroded, especially in view of the rapid pace of developments taking place in our neighbouring countries. The concept for the Tun Hussein Onn Eye Hospital in

Kuala Lumpur originated in 1981, the same year we conceptualised our proposed National Eye Institute. By March 1986, the Malaysian hospital was built and ready to admit its first patients. Similar developments are also taking place in Hong Kong, Indonesia, and China.

This report aims at reviving interest and generating commitment in the National Eye Institute proposal. Despite the rapid developments in our neighbouring countries, we may still have a chance of success. But immediate action must be taken.

I. Introduction

The demand for high-quality ophthalmic care in Singapore and Southeast Asia is increasing with the ageing of the population and rising affluence. Although some of our neighbouring countries have already succeeded in setting up eye hospitals, Singapore's standard of ophthalmic practice is still relatively higher. In order for Singapore to keep pace with her Asian neighbours, an institute with an emphasis on both education and research must be built. It will act as a nucleus to concentrate all manpower resources from both the public and private sectors for the advancement of ophthalmology in Singapore.

II. Objectives

The primary objective of the institute is to offer the highest possible standard of expertise in ophthalmology to the people of Singapore. A world-class standard will also establish the institute as a regional referral centre. The institute will promote continuing and advanced education as well as R & D in ophthalmology, and will spearhead industry-related joint ventures.

III. Concept

Basically, the Institute can be divided into three parts:

- i. the institute proper
- ii. the clinical wing
- iii. the commercial wing

i. *The Institute Proper*

The institute proper, consisting of laboratories, lecture theatres, etc. is geared for research, teaching, and continuing education. Funds to subsidise R&D projects will come from the commercial wing and from the Singapore Eye Foundation.

In order for Singapore to keep pace with her Asian neighbours, an institute with an emphasis on both education and research must be built.

ii. *The Clinical Wing*

The clinical wing will consist of general, emergency, and specialist clinics. Charges should be structured in such a way that the clinical wing is self-sufficient (similar to that of the NUH). Clinical research may need to be subsidised.

iii. *The Commercial Wing*

The commercial wing will be the main revenue centre with space to be leased out for shops (pharmacies, optical shops, etc.). Space can also be leased out for clinical use, e.g. ophthalmologists and related disciplines.

Since the primary objective of the Institute is to fully utilise our medical manpower, the concept of the commercial wing in the Institute is important, as it helps to break down the artificial barrier between private and institutional practices.

IV. Business Structure

The proposal is to set up the National Eye Institute as a nonprofit-making company. The Institute will be independently run by a board of directors, and will be self-sufficient financially.

The major consideration for proposing such a structure is the need for prompt action, and this is only possible without bureaucratic constraints. Unless the Director of the Institute is given a free hand to plan and develop for the first five years, his effectiveness to propel the Institute to international excellence will be limited. The Institute can be returned to the NUH after 10 years.

V. Target Time-Frame

Our target completion date of the National Eye Institute is 1990, when the International Congress of Ophthalmology will be held in Singapore. The plan calls for immediate action, which we can approach in three phases:

Phase I: Incorporate the Eye Institute as a nonprofit-making private institute by 1 July 1987.

Phase II: Target the Institute's interim premises to be operational by 1 January 1988.

Phase III: Finalise plans for the permanent location of the Institute by 1 July 1988.

Incorporation of Institute

A draft Memorandum & Articles of Association has been drawn up (by Donaldson & Burkinshaw) for the Institute. Initially, with the Institute incorporated as a private concern, it can be amended, dissolved, or absorbed if the NUH finally decides to take over the Institute at a later date.

Interim Facility

It is critical to set up an interim facility to bring together staff and resources, to set up the organisation, and to build up momentum so that, when the new building is completed, the work of the Institute is ready to take off.

Joint Venture Proposal — National Medical Enterprise and Professor Arthur Lim

Numerous meetings were held to establish a private international eye centre as a joint venture with the American healthcare company, the National Medical Enterprise, which owns Mount Elizabeth Hospital (MEH). There were also numerous meetings with other private medical institutions including the Balestier Hospital, the Youngberg Hospital which had an eye department, and the eye clinic of Dr Oh Thiam Hock at Hill Street. There were many discussions to transform one of these into a major eye centre.

There were many meetings with Mr Michael Ford, Vice President of the American healthcare company, National Medical Enterprise, which owned MEH, and Dr Dallas Riddle, its Chief Executive Officer.

Excerpts from the minutes of the meeting on the proposed purchase of the 17th floor, Mount Elizabeth Hospital, on Thursday, 12th February 1987 at 4pm at Block B, 6th Floor, Mount Elizabeth Hospital

Present:

Mr Michael Ford, VP, NME

Mr Dallas Riddle, CEO, MEH

Mr Dennis Brown, ADMIN, MEH

Ms Chiam Soo Lee

Ms Joni Low

1. *The meeting commenced with a discussion on the plan to have two operating theatres (Willis and Kibble), according to Dr Lim's concept of combining surgery with teaching/live demonstrations. There should preferably be two operating theatres with a glass screen all round on one side and four TV monitors for the audience.*
2. *If built, it would be the first in this region. Currently, there are less than five such theatres in the world, the simple reason being that few surgeons feel comfortable demonstrating their skills to a live audience. Dr Lim is no newcomer — he has been holding regular surgical demonstrations.*

Letter from Dr SB Kwa, Permanent Secretary (Health)/Director of Medical Services & Chairman, Health Corporation of Singapore Pte Ltd

In February 1989, Dr S B Kwa, Permanent Secretary (Health), Director of Medical Services (Health), and Chairman of HCS Pte Ltd, appointed Prof Arthur Lim as the Medical Director-designate of the Singapore National Eye Centre.

23 February 1989

Dr Arthur Lim

Chief, Dept of Ophthalmology
NUH

Dear Arthur

SINGAPORE NATIONAL EYE CENTRE

I am pleased to inform you that the HCS Board has accepted the recommendations of the Protem Eye Centre Planning Committee for immediate implementation. A new subsidiary called the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC) Pte Ltd will be incorporated shortly with an authorized capital of \$30 million and a paid-up capital of \$10 million to see through the creation of the Centre.

Accordingly, I am setting up the SNEC Planning Committee and charging it with the responsibility to see through the speedy and successful implementation of the project.

I would like to invite you to serve on the SNEC Planning Committee as its Chairman. I would also like to confirm your appointment as the Medical Director-designate of the SNEC.

Our vision is for the SNEC to attain international eminence within a decade. I look forward to your acceptance.

Yours sincerely

Dr Kwa Soon Bee

Chairman
HCS Pte Ltd

1989



I would like to confirm your appointment as the Medical Director-designate of the SNEC.

Our vision is for the SNEC to attain international eminence within a decade.

1990

Soon after that, Mr Yeo Cheow Tong, then the Health Minister, had a one-hour private meeting with me at his office and it was with the support of the Minister, together with the determination of Dr Kwa, that the SNEC was formed. It can be said that Dr Kwa played the most important role in the establishment of the SNEC and later the Singapore Eye Research Institute (SERI), supported by Minister Yeo Cheow Tong. Mr Khaw Boon Wan and I met almost every week to establish the numerous details essential for the success of the development.

Initially, it was decided to establish SNEC as a service and teaching centre with a relatively small section on research. It was clear that research had to be developed; and on 14 April 1990, I made a strong recommendation to Dr Kwa to establish the Institute of Ophthalmology (or the Singapore Eye Research Institute).



Letter to Dr SB Kwa, Chairman, SNEC

14 April 1990

Dr S B Kwa
Chairman, SNEC

RE: INSTITUTE OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

The proposed research institute of ophthalmology is exciting, as it will complement the SNEC — together, they will form an effective ophthalmic infrastructure to help push Singapore forward as a leading nation for ophthalmic care, research, and development in the 1990s.

Ophthalmology, which has remained dormant for centuries in Asia (including Singapore), has awakened. This is because of the recent economic growth in the Pacific Rim nations and in Southeast Asia. During this watershed period, a period of transition, there will be many controversies and uncertainties.

The issue before us is just one of the many problems which we will have to face in the coming decade. I am therefore presenting some facts with the hope that we may make the right decision for the future of ophthalmic development in Singapore.

There are now before us two closely related, yet different, tertiary developments — a service (SNEC) and a research centre. These two developments should complement, and not rival, each other.

1990

The crucial question is whether research, in particular basic research, can be more effective in the SNEC or whether it can be developed better at the University. In general, the ideal is to have the two centres within one complex. However, there are compelling reasons to do otherwise.

The main problem will be the recurrent expenditure. Who will be funding research? I do not think the Shaw Foundation will be prepared to make a substantial capital involvement and then agree to pay for recurrent costs. Research is a very expensive investment, and without the assurance of finance we cannot expect to secure good staff. Nothing of real intrinsic quality will be forthcoming, and the Institute will just be a financial burden to SNEC and will become a proverbial white elephant: a mere show piece without good staff or achievements. It is destined to fail miserably.

Both you and I can raise funds. Maybe we can help sustain it for a few years, but we must plan beyond this. Will my successor be able to raise funds? Will our ability to raise funds for the next few years merely delay the onset of the problem?

Let us now look at my other proposal.

By having the Institute at the University, it will be assured of funds for its recurrent expenditure. It will also enjoy certain conveniences:

- *easy access to the basic research laboratory and animal holding unit*
- *collaborative effort and exchange of knowledge with the University's many departments, including the Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology*
- *the University would be attractive for those ophthalmologists and professionals who are more dedicated to academic pursuits and research than financial returns*

It is a setting that can make the institute a great success — a success which you and I will be proud of.

Dr Arthur Lim

The crucial question is whether research, in particular basic research, can be more effective in the SNEC or whether it can be developed better at the University.



However, to become world class — the best eye centre in Asia — and to compete with the top centres of Europe and North America, we need to have a research base.

Letter to Dr SB Kwa, Permanent Secretary (Health)/ Director of Medical Services, Ministry of Health

15 July 1991

Dr S B Kwa

PS (Health)/DMS,
Ministry of Health

EYE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

I am happy to say that, with the strong support of the government, the handsome and well-equipped Singapore National Eye Centre building has been completed. Every visitor is happy with the facility. It can be said that we have completed phase I of the development of ophthalmology.

Phase II will consist of getting an effective team of ophthalmologists together to propel ophthalmology into the 21st century. I believe we have the ophthalmologists who can provide a top-class clinic and research centre. However, to become world class — the best eye centre in Asia — and to compete with the top centres of Europe and North America, we need to have a research base.

I am writing to seek your support to have the Eye Research Institute established adjacent to SNEC, as having the two facilities within the same area of one or two acres would give a strong national image, among other advantages. My plan, attached, has been submitted to you as the Chairman of SNEC. It can be modified as there are several ways we can develop a research institute. We have also obtained support from various foundations and my patients.

I am also writing to seek your support to help make this development something that Singapore can be proud of. I have recently received a most encouraging report by an independent expert evaluator from Cleveland Clinic, USA, one of the world's renowned medical centres. Dr Richard G Farmer was invited by your Ministry (Health) to evaluate your hospital and medical centres. He has written to me. His comments are important as it reflects an independent expert evaluation of the SNEC.

*I hope to have your support to ensure that phase II moves forward successfully.
I have also written to the University/Ministry of Education to seek their support.*

With best wishes

Prof Arthur Lim

Medical Director, SNEC

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I appeal for your support to help establish in Singapore an eye centre which will be the top eye centre in Asia and hopefully one of the top 10 eye centres in the world.

... to achieve international excellence, quality service alone is inadequate. We need strong clinical and basic research.

Letter to Mr Yeo Cheow Tong, Minister for Health

13 August 1991

Mr Yeo Cheow Tong

Minister for Health, Ministry of Health

Dear Sir

I am writing as a private citizen concerned with the development of medical excellence in our Republic. It is with this in mind that I appeal for your support to help establish in Singapore an eye centre which will be the top eye centre in Asia and hopefully one of the top 10 eye centres in the world.

In the past decade, eye development in Singapore has been rapid, due mainly to the strong support from Dr SB Kwa, Permanent Secretary (Health), and more recently from you as Minister for Health and the Vice Chancellor Prof Lim Pin. As a result, the Singapore Eye Foundation (SEF) was formed in 1983, the National University Hospital Eye Department in 1986, the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC) in 1990, and the National University of Singapore Eye Department in 1991. In addition, Singapore has in recent years made considerable international impact in numerous directions, one of these being the March 1990 International Ophthalmology Congress (ICO), regarded as one of the most successful international ophthalmic congresses ever held.

The SNEC is making good progress, and has already gained considerable local and international recognition. Recently, we had visitors from two leading US medical centres, the Mayo Clinic and the Cleveland Clinic, at the invitation of the Ministry of Health, who visited the SNEC and expressed their confidence in our potential.

However, it is well known that to achieve international excellence, quality service alone is inadequate. We need strong clinical and basic research. I have, therefore, proposed the establishment of the National Eye Research Institute, to be developed adjacent to the SNEC if approved.

If we can achieve the high level of international reputation and excellence in eye development, this will also help spur the development internationally of the other medical disciplines and professions.

In developing a leading centre for eye care, it is important that the poorer

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Singaporeans must also benefit. I therefore propose that another block adjacent to the SNEC for subsidised patients be also established. With this, the poorer citizens of our Republic will enjoy high-quality eye care, although without the added comfort which those who can afford to pay can enjoy.

I have had discussions with MOH and NUS recently on the proposed developments. Although I have received strong positive support from both, it is apparent that there are obstacles to expeditious development from several ministries, the land office, financial ministerial approval, subvention for subsidised patients, and numerous internal and 'invisible' problems. All of these obstacles are man-made, and I believe they can and should be removed or bypassed.

It appears that the development will be delayed for several years unless I appeal to the Ministers-in-Charge for their support to overcome the obstacles. This is of considerable urgency, as I hope to be able to retire as the Medical Director of SNEC in 3 years. I really hope to get the development going by 1992. In fact, I have already indicated my intention to retire to the Chairman of SNEC, and have suggested two excellent ophthalmologists who can succeed me as Medical Director. In addition, I have built up a team of young ophthalmologists in their 30s who will be able to carry the whole development into the 21st century.

I will be making a full report, including an executive summary of my entire proposal which I hope to complete in a month. The report will be sent to you as soon as it is ready. I sincerely hope that in the meanwhile you can spare a few minutes to consider this issue and give my proposal your support.

Yours respectfully

Prof Arthur Lim

*cc: Dr SB Kwa
Prof Lim Pin*

*Similar letters sent to:
Dr Tony Tan (Minister for Education)
Dr Richard Hu (Minister for Finance)
Prof S Jayakumar (Minister for Law and Home Affairs)
Mr S Dhanabalan (Minister for National Development)*

All of these obstacles are man-made and I believe they can and should be removed or bypassed.

*The National Eye
Research Institute
be set up with 50/50
participation of
SNEC/MOH and
NUS/MOE.*

SNEC Board Paper

OPERATION PLANS BY ARTHUR LIM AND CHARITY WAI

Board Paper : 20 September 1991

Subject : NATIONAL EYE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

1. Following the proposal on the establishment of the National Eye Research Institute (NERI) submitted at the last board meeting, further discussions were held on the constitution of the proposed NERI and the details on lease of land and funding of development and recurrent expenditure.
2. One major concern is the long-term viability of NERI in terms of the recurring expenditure for running costs and grants for the research projects. Another important consideration is the need to foster close links with the University for basic research.
3. With the proximity of NERI to the SNEC, there are advantages of sharing common facilities and corporate services between SNEC and NERI.
4. Taking into account the above factors, the following structure is proposed:
 - 4.1 NERI be set up with 50/50 participation of SNEC/MOH and NUS/MOE;
 - 4.2 NERI be instituted as an extension of the SNEC.
The above structure will ensure continued government support and funding for research, joint development, and high-level cooperation between SNEC and NUS, as well as achieving a symbiotic relationship by integrating NERI within the SNEC.
5. Funds requested for NERI are as follows:
 - 5.1 A capital grant of \$9 million from the MOF for building and equipment to match the \$3 million private donations collected;
 - 5.2 Grant for recurrent expenditure from the MOF of \$500,000 per year for 6 years.
6. For the Board's discussion and approval

Letter from Dr SB Kwa, PS (Health)/DMS

1 October 1991

Administrator, SNEC

Donations Received for the National Eye Research Centre

Thank you for your memo of 24 September 1991.

I am currently discussing with my officials and the Department of Inland Revenue on donations for the proposed National Eye Research Centre. I will revert to you and Prof Arthur Lim in due course.

Dr SB Kwa

PS/DMS

1991



Report on Donations Received for the National Eye Research Institute

Name of Donor	Amount of Donation & Date Received / Confirmed
1. Shaw Foundation	\$1 million received on 27.12.90 and credited to the MOH Endowment Fund
2. Lee Foundation	\$200,000 received on 14.2.91 and credited to the MOH Endowment Fund
3. Hong Leong Foundation	\$1 million confirmed on 23.7.91 Donation in two instalments: 50% by end 1991 and 50% by end 1992
4. Drs A Lim, Ang BC & Khoo CY	\$200,000 between 3 – 5 years Confirmed on 26.6.91
	Total: \$ 2.4 million

SNEC Board Paper**OPERATION PLANS BY ARTHUR LIM AND CHARITY WAI**

Board Paper : 8 November 1991
 Subject : PROGRESS REPORT ON PROPOSED NATIONAL
 EYE RESEARCH INSTITUTE (NERI)

1. Following the last Board discussion, the appropriate corporate structure of the proposed NERI has been further discussed with MOH(Dev) Officers.

2. Proposed Constitution

The two options being explored are as follows:

(A) incorporate as a separate tax-exempt private company limited by guarantee;

(B) set up as a subsidiary of SNEC.

2.1 Proposed Model of Constitution

Option A to institute the NERI as a separate entity is preferred, as there are fundamental differences between running a clinical service and conducting research: the latter does not attract earnings and is often pursued for altruistic reasons. Therefore, organizationally, it is better to separate the two activities. A separate entity as an approved Institute of Public Character (IPC) will also allow NERI to raise funds for research directly rather than having to channel donations through the MOH Endowment Fund in order for the donations to enjoy tax exemption. In general, donors are more prepared to give towards a specific purpose and a specific entity than to a general fund.

The constitution of the Academy of Medicine, which has been incorporated as a company limited by guarantee, is being studied as a model for NERI. A copy of the Constitution is attached in Appendix A for information. The implications of the constitution and tax-exempt status will be discussed with both our legal and tax advisors.

2.2 Links with the NUS

It is vital for the research institute to have strong links with the university for facilitating access to its infrastructure and facilities, especially for basic research which is expensive to duplicate. It is therefore proposed that the research institute be 50/50 owned by the SNEC/MOH and the NUS/MOE. This requires the support of both the MOH and the MOE for NERI. A joint DPC paper will be put up for government support and funding for NERI. The SNEC will undertake the drafting of the DPC paper once details on the structure, physical requirements, and funding are finalised.