

**Opening address (talking points) by Dr Myint Htwe, Union Minister
for Health and Sports at the 49th Myanmar Health Research Congress,
Department of Medical Research, Yangon**

(18-1-2021)

- Greetings from Nay Pyi Taw: To all research scientists and professionals from medical and allied disciplines attending this virtual congress..... wishing all of you the best of health and happiness for 2021 and beyond.
- Honored to deliver the opening address at the annually held Myanmar Health Research congress. This is the 49th session of the congress.
- Thanking the Organizing Committee for making this Congress a reality in spite of the fact that all of us are busy tackling the COVID 19 pandemic and its consequences.
- The Congress theme “Fighting together against COVID 19” is most appropriate given the fact that all of us are eying on the unexpected occurrences, sailing in the uncharted territory together with unpredictable direction of the SARS-CoV-2 in our country.
- Symposium on “Lessons Learned from COVID 19 Pandemic” is timely as we can learn many things even before the end of the pandemic.
- Here, I would like to thank DMR staff for swab taking, PCR testing and whole genome sequencing of the virus.
- I have noticed that the quality of papers to be read and posters displayed in the Congress are of high quality in nature and improved tremendously throughout the years.
- It is really a promising sign for our country in furthering the research domain. I am really proud of it.

- The spectrum of research areas covered in the Congress is becoming wider and wider – a clear cut signal of progress in the research domain under the able leadership of successive Directors-General.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- One important point which all of us should pay attention to is whenever we are formulating a policy or strategy for any health program or technical area, it must be compulsorily based on the research findings pertaining to the program or area in question.
- This should be the rule rather than an exception. As far as my knowledge goes, it is not the rule but not yet an exception. We all should strive to achieve this notion.
- I would like to make a proposition to the professionals of DMR to do a quick review on the last seven or so Myanmar Research Congresses from various perspectives using different parameters on the contents, *modus operandi* and award receiving papers.
- It could yield valuable information for setting up the best agenda and many other things for the conduct of future MHRC.
- If we really want to progress further in the area of research in this competing world, our thought processes, actions and futuristic ideas must be dynamic and robust. We should not do business as usual or traditional way of doing things.
- Therefore, I would like to urge the senior management of DMR to have more brainstorming sessions among upcoming research scientists working in DMR with special invitees from other departments and universities under MoHS.
- Regular in-house talks on state-of-the-art topics must be the order of the day, where new ideas can be hatched. Our thought processes must not be bound by the red tape especially for the professionals of DMR, which is, in fact, a research institution. I want to cut the red tape vertically rather than horizontally.

- I have even asked DG DMR to consider giving additional title grades to staff of DMR such as Research Scientists - A, B, C, D, E, F, G, etc. rather than calling DG, DyDG, Director, Deputy Director and Assistant Director. These are administrative connotations.
- In fact, I want DMR to be a premier research institution rather than a department. It is a misnomer. I have to submit this proposal to the cabinet to get it approved. It is beyond my authority.

Distinguished Guest, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I want to recapitulate some of the achievements of DMR during the current tenure of the government.
- These achievements are due to the diligent effort of research scientists and professionals working in DMR. These achievements must be sustained.

(1) The most important achievement is formulation of the “National Health Research Policy” (NHRP) in line with (i) the changing health care scenario, (ii) developmental status of research arena, (iii) changing epidemiological situation of diseases and conditions in Myanmar and (iv) contemporary happenings in other parts of the world.

However, we still need to develop strategies for each policy statement as mentioned in the NHRP. This would lead to emergence of succinct road map, framework and future directions of research that we need to pursue.

All future research projects must be directed towards achieving the inherent connotations of each policy statement.

(2) With long term perspective in mind to train and nurture our upcoming researchers and health professionals, we have opened the "Research Training Center" in Pyin Oo Lwin, where we are conducting research training courses on – responsible conduct of research, research management, research methodology, research ethics, research proposal development, data presentation and analysis, data to policy, literature search, research plan of actions, etc.

I would like to apprise the participants that a new and modern building is being built at a cost of 4.696 billion kyats near the current Research Training Center, replacing the old one.

(3) We have established the "National Health Research Registry", where we can get a lot of information. It would be very useful when we are contemplating future direction of health research in my country.

(4) "Health Research Information System" was also formed.

(5) Many Institutional Review Boards (IRB) are being formed in departments, universities and big hospitals under MoHS.

(6) During the tenure of this government, we have allocated 9 billion Kyats for research and research training, covering budget years from 17-18 to 20-21. This is unprecedented. We have never allocated such big sum of budget for research and research training purposes in the history of MoHS.

(7) We even developed a very unique "Research Title Bank" where young researchers can do a quick pick to suit their purpose for conducting research. Research fund is ready to be used.

(8) "Research Management" Training Manual was prepared by Dr Than Tun Sein and printed two months ago with funding support from INGO Community Partners International. This was with reference to the Research Management Modules developed by me, Dr Than Tun Sein and Dr Mon Mon, while I was working in WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia Region.

(9) Since 2016, I have given special emphasis on the importance of "responsible conduct of research and research ethics". To my delight, "Principles for Responsible Conduct of Research and Research Ethics: A Handbook" was published recently.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- I would like to share my vision for the health research domain in my country.

- Need to conduct more multicentric collaborative research with extramural research institutions located outside the country.
- More research projects on administrative, management, and logistics perspectives of the health care delivery system be conducted
- Need to further improve and expand the number of IRBs in S/R offices, all 16 universities, all 7 departments and big hospitals under MoHS
- More training courses on capacity building of IRB members
- Opening of master courses on research, biostatistics, research ethics, responsible conduct of research, immunology, vaccinology, etc.
- Compulsory inclusion of research subjects in the curriculum of each scholastic year of all courses run by 16 universities and 53 nursing and midwifery schools.
- More certificate courses on research and research related areas such as sampling and sample size computation, epidemiologic methods used in research, and interventional research
- More research on contemporary and evolving situation in the field of health, such as
 - SARS-Cov-2 COVID-19
 - Performance of INGOs for supporting MoHS
 - Resource flow and resource allocation pattern of MoHS
 - Health implications of internal migration
 - Health policy research vis-à-vis outcome and impact
 - Interaction between politics, economics and health
 - Job description of health staff vis-à-vis actual performance within a set environment

- Performance of departments under MoHS in terms of output/ outcome and preferably impact on population health.
- More qualitative research on NCD and healthy and unhealthy lifestyles of the population
- Performance of BHS professional vis-à-vis job description with a view to streamline and improve the job descriptions of BHS, who are the backbone or skeletal framework for the public health domain. The purpose is to streamline and improve the JD of BHS professionals.
- Performance of departments under MoHS in terms of output, outcome and impact
- Zoonotic diseases, epidemic prone diseases, etc.
- More evaluative and interventional research rather than simple KAP studies
- Research on research utilization itself. Are we actually utilizing the findings of research being carried out in the country?
- More innovative or health futures research
- We should strive for having a “National Research Policy” and “National Research Council”, who can lead and give overall guidance to make research as one of the tools for the overall development of the country
- We have one WHO Collaborating Center for malaria in DMR. WHO is very strict in extending WHO Collaborating Centers. If we are not doing innovation activity/research, they will take back the title as WHO CC. We need to be careful about this.

CONCLUSION

1. Research is the backbone for improving the performance of health care delivery system in our country.
2. I would like more BHS professionals such as health assistants, midwives, nurses, para medical staff, administrative staff attending and presenting papers in the congress.
3. For improving the medical education system in my country, I would like to have more medical education related research conducted by faculty members of the 16 universities and 53 nursing and midwifery schools.
4. We need to review very seriously as to what extent that we are actually (I repeat, actually) utilizing the findings of research in terms of improving our resource allocation, resource utilization, strategy modification, etc.
5. All research must be geared towards achieving quality medical care as well as effective and efficient public health services to the population at large.
6. Last but not least, I would like to mention that “level of development of research in a country is directly proportional to the level of development of a country”.

Thank you.

The inaugural session of the congress was attended by the Union Minister for Education, Chief Minister of Yangon Region, Social Welfare Minister of Yangon Region, Former Ministers of Health, Deputy Minister of Health, Director-General, Senior Professionals in addition to current Deputy Minister, Permanent Secretary, Directors-General, Senior Officials of Departments under MoHS, Rectors and Professors of Universities under MoHS, hundreds of research scientists, staff members from states and regions and research scientists from other countries. A total of 670 participants attended the inaugural session.