

**Opening remarks by Dr. Myint Htwe, Union Minister for Health and Sports, at the  
47<sup>th</sup> Myanmar Health Research Congress (7–11 January 2019)**

**Department of Medical Research, Yangon**

**(8<sup>th</sup> January 2019)**

Mingalabar! Good morning!

- Greetings to Chairman of Union Peace Commission Dr Tin Myo Win, Chairman of the Amyotha Hluttaw Health, Sports and Cultural Committee Dr Zaw Lin Htut, Former Minister and Deputy Ministers for Health, Former Director-General of Department of Medical Research Dr Aung Than Batu, Permanent Secretaries of the Ministry of Health and Sports, Directors – Generals and Rectors, President of MMC, President of MMA, President of MAMS, President of Myanmar Red Cross Society, WHO representative to Myanmar, Officials from INGOs, local NGOs, International Researchers and Scientists from USA, Japan, Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia, UK and South Korea, Professors, senior professionals from Departments under MoHS and Universities, Senior researchers from Department of Medical Research, Steering committee, Executive committee and Sub Committee Members of this 47th Myanmar Health Research Congress and all distinguished guests and participants.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is my distinct privilege and honor to deliver the opening remarks at this august gathering of the 47<sup>th</sup> Myanmar Health Research Congress.
- First of all, I would like to thank all those involved in making this annually held knowledge sharing platform a reality.
- I have noticed and appreciated that the spectrum of scientists involved in the congress has also been expanding every year.
- This congress is like a gold mine for young research scientists as well as for senior

research scientists in terms of expanding their knowledge horizon and strengthening the knowledge base.

- At the very outset, I would like to mention that one of the priorities of MoHS is to promote research culture in the medical and paramedical universities and schools as well as in hospitals located at various levels of the health care delivery system in the country.
- Simultaneously, promotion of implementation research is going on with increasing momentum in the field of public health.
- In the coming months and years, I have decided to give more emphasis for conducting clinical research in hospitals.
- For that matter, we need strong interest and proactive collaboration between clinicians and paramedical professionals with research scientists from DMR.
- In order to facilitate this, we have started developing a roadmap for conducting certificate courses for data presentation and analysis, research management, responsible conduct of research, research ethics, research integrity, research methodology including qualitative and quantitative research methods, International Conference on Harmonization – Good Clinical Practice (ICH GCP) Guidelines, and research paper writing under the technical leadership of staff from DMR and other departments of MoHS.
- We have already done a test run course in data presentation.
- Through this certificate programs, I am confident that research acumen as well as research interest will go high among the clinicians and staff of departments under MoHS.
- I am glad to mention that through collaboration with University of Maryland, we are introducing diploma courses for research methodology and research ethics.

We have also very strong collaboration with Duke University from USA and many Universities from Japan and Korea. We are now paving a way for renewed collaboration with University of Malaya, Institutions from Australia, UK, Indonesia, etc.

- Additionally, Myanmar Health Research Congress (MHRC) for this year initiated an online registration system and online submission of research abstracts successfully. It is a big achievement.
- I would like to count on all of you to come on board in developing the research roadmap. Let us work together closely and proactively for the sake of improvement of the whole research domain in our country which could serve as a strong foundation stone for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of performance of national health care delivery system.
- We are also promoting multi-centric research working collaboratively with many research institutions and universities outside the country under the umbrella of official Memoranda of Understanding.
- In-country multi-centric research projects with medical related institutions are also crucial for overall development of the country.
- Currently, the MoHS has allowed unlimited and unrestricted communications to our health research professionals with scientists and researchers from research institutions and universities all over the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- As a matter of fact, which I have alluded to earlier, the MHRC is an effective knowledge and experience sharing platform among the researchers, clinicians, public health professionals, and administrators in the context of effectively serving the population at large in Myanmar.

- Therefore, all of us, especially the upcoming young research professionals, should make the most out of this research congress through application of some of the key findings of research projects presented here in real life situation either in clinical domain or in public health domain.
- Although I said clinical and public health domain, these two domains are, in fact, intertwined and interrelated and reinforcing each other very strongly and cohesively.
- What I am deriving at is clinicians, including paramedical professionals and public health professionals, must work as a team in conducting research, which can reinforce each other tremendously.
- Specifically, I would urge professionals from DMR to support the nurses and midwives and paramedical professionals to conduct research in their respective areas of work. Research is now part of the curriculum of nursing and midwifery schools.
- As Myanmar is a developing country, we have some budget constraints in terms of allocating funds for research vis a vis other priority health programs.
- Be that as it may, knowing that research is an essential ingredient for health development activities, MoHS had allocated (1) billion kyats for (17-18) budget year, (0.5) billion kyats for (2018 six months) budget year and (1.5) billion kyats for (18-19) budget year.
- Never in the history of MoH, we got this amount of budget for health research. We have to thank the government especially due to the fact that there are limitations in overall budget availability, and also our country is not that rich.
- For the developing country like Myanmar, this sum is significant in a sense that we do not necessarily need a huge amount of money for conducting research in Myanmar except for certain basic health research areas.

- The allocated budget is primarily intended for use in strengthening capacity and capability of researchers and research scientists in terms of doing the following subject areas.
  - (i) Establishing good research management practices.
  - (ii) Practicing responsible conduct of research.
  - (iii) Promoting the application of ICH GCP guidelines and conducting clinical trials.
  - (iv) Strictly practicing research ethics.
  - (v) Increasing the capacity of members of Ethical Review Committees (ERC) or Institutional Review Boards (IRB) in universities and departments under MoHS.
  - (vi) Developing National Health Research Agenda (involving MMA, MDA, MAMS, MNMA, MHA, departments under MoHS, etc.) as per the national health research policy.
  - (vii) Conducting implementation research and clinical research.
- For (2019–2020) budget year, I intend to allocate (3) billion kyats.
- The reason for increasing the research budget is that, through conduct of research we can improve the clinical acumen, public health acumen, paramedical acumen and especially nursing and midwifery acumen – to mention a few.
- The amount allocated for health research for MoHS is relatively small compared to research budget allocated in other countries.
- We are, in fact, using this research budget to also rekindle interest in conducting research among our staff for promoting research culture in our country.
- But this country budget on research is greatly supplemented with research funds coming in from universities and institutions from abroad, UN agencies and INGOs

working in our country.

- For which I thank all of them on behalf of the MoHS.
- Here, I would like to again urge our staff members to conduct more implementation research for increasing the efficiency of management, administrative, logistics perspectives of program delivery and also for improving technical perspectives and quality of health care services rendered by various health programs of MoHS.
- Taking this opportunity, I would also like to request the non-medical, administrative and finance staff to conduct research in their respective areas. We have funds to support this.
- The notion previously in our MoHS was that only medical doctors could and should do research. We have to change that notion or remove that line of thinking once and for all.
- Another area that we are doing is improving the capacity and capability of our newly recruited staff to DMR or newly joined medical doctors.
- For that matter, we need to plan carefully and do it in a systematic manner and also applying innovative approaches.
- “Business as usual” approach for promoting research will not be effective. As we have to adjust to the changing circumstances or changing epidemiological situations. We need to streamline and adjust our strategies and approaches for promoting health research to all categories of staff in our country accordingly. I am not saying that we are not doing well. But we can do more using innovative approaches for promoting health research.
- INGOs and local NGOs are also urged to conduct research as much as possible in our country but within the purview of the MOU signed between INGOs and MoHS.

- However, I would like to emphatically emphasize that before conducting any research study by any INGO or local NGO, it is mandatory to get approval from ERC of DMR or IRB of University of Public Health in Yangon or from Medical Universities.
- Conducting research study without the approval of ERC or IRB is tantamount to “research findings are null and void” and we will not honor the findings.
- The research findings should also not be referred to our country’s overall health scenario. In legal terms, it is illegal.
- This point is particularly emphasized because we found studies being conducted by iNGOs and NGOs without ERC or IRB approval especially in Rakhine State.

Dear colleague researchers,

- I would like to urge the professionals of DMR and senior faculty members of 16 universities of medicine and related disciplines to chalk out the road map for capacity building on research for undergraduate and postgraduate students attending the universities.
- We need to do it in a phase-wise, step-wise and in a systematic manner without fail.
- Another area which we would like to further promote seriously is to heighten the level of collaborative research or multi-centric research studies with like-minded universities, organizations, associations, foundations and institutions outside the country.
- We also definitely need to collaborate with pharmaceutical companies and private sector.
- Conducting such multi-centric studies will benefit both the parties.
- The MoHS is more than ready to support this initiative. I would suggest the

professionals from outside the countries attending this conference to discuss with Myanmar health research professionals and consider initiating more multi-centric studies.

- There are more than 40 or so WHO collaborative projects or programs run by MoHS. The Program Directors and Project Managers need to consider having built-in implementation research studies in their respective areas.
- Dear fellow researchers,
- DMR had recently developed Health Research Information System (HRIS). I would like to congratulate all those involved for making this initiative a reality.
- The information coming out from the HRIS must be compulsorily reviewed and analyzed from time to time and adjust our health research strategies.
- The analogy is that HRIS for research domain is like a central nervous system to the human body.
- I would like our research domain in our country to be dynamic and responsive to the need of the country.
- We now have the National Health Research Policy approved by the cabinet last year.
- It is now time to find out whether our national health research strategies and activities are in line with the spectrum of our newly formulated National Health Research Policy.
- I would like to propose some research areas which you may wish to consider in 2019 for improving the performance of departments of public health and medical care.
  - (i) Procurement and distribution system and efficiency of medical supplies and equipment to various states/regions.



- (ii) Changing pattern of disease occurrence, communicable as well as non-communicable diseases, in terms of various parameters in states and regions of the country.
- (iii) Health budget allocation pattern in the MoHS to various entities using National Health Account as an input.
- (iv) Distribution versus production versus requirement of all categories of human resource for health.
- (v) Management and governance system of MoHS.
- (vi) HRH deployment of health institutions in various parts of the country versus patient load and pattern versus disease occurrence pattern.
- (vii) Performance/efficiency of rural health centers and sub-rural health centers.
- (viii) Logistics and patient flow pattern inside the hospital for various categories of hospitals in the country.
- (ix) Capacity building for members of ERC or IRB.
- (x) Emergency room administration and management in hospitals.
- Another area which I would like you to do is strengthening the already existing health research registry platform. The development of national health research registry must be complemented with formation of “Research Oversight Committee”.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

- I have also noted that the quality of research papers as well as the posters presented in this congress had improved tremendously for which I would like to sincerely convey my deep appreciation to all researchers. The number of research papers are also increasing yearly.
- It is noted that 90 research posters are being displayed and 141 papers are going

to be read and discussed.

- This is a good sign for MoHS indicating that the research culture is somewhat properly rooted in our country.
- But we will still need to nurture the younger generation so that we can grow well, robust and strong in the years to come.
- I would like to congratulate all the poster presenters and PI & Co-PI and researchers for all the achievements they have made.
- It also gives me a very strong justification to get more budget for research in 19/20 fiscal year i.e., starting from 1st October 2019.
- My remarks will not be complete if I do not convey my appreciation to the Organizing Committee and Sub-committee Members who give time and relentless effort to assess the posters and papers for awarding best papers, best posters, etc.
- Having said that, all of us sitting here are aware that it is very important for the research domain to review the extent of utilization of research findings in real life situation.
- I would urge the departments under MoHS to form a 'Research Utilization and Monitoring Committee' to give advice to the Executive Committee of MoHS for formulating overall and strategic direction in the field of research for 2019–2020.
- Another area that we need to think of it is establishing a small “Office of Research Integrity” in DMR.
- The central theme of this year Health Research Congress is “Ensure WASH: A global agenda to improve quality of life”.
- As the sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 states, “Ensure availability and

sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”, it entails tremendous tasks and could not be achieved by one actor alone.

- Ensuring WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) requires the helping hands of many stakeholders including policy makers, academia, health care professionals, researchers, developmental partners, governmental and non-governmental organizations to come together to close the gaps in WASH service delivery and to improve the quality of life. I am glad that the theme of this conference had been selected reasonably well.

Dear colleague researchers,

- As in my last year opening remarks given at the health research congress, I would like to reiterate one particular point, i.e., health research is not an entity inherent to the professionals working in DMR.
- This notion must be removed totally.
- Research is a public good where all staff, irrespective of the departments in which they are working, have the inherent right to conduct research and certain proportions of their work time should be reserved for conducting research pertaining to their area of work.
- MoHS is creating enabling environments for conducting research in various departments under MoHS. It is easier said than done. But, we will strive to do it to the extent possible in the coming months and years.
- I would like our staff to conduct research as much as possible. The reason being that “one of the side benefits of conducting research is development of critical and analytical thinking skill among the staff.
- Ladies and gentlemen,
- Hundreds of health research studies or projects were conducted as part of

the requirement for master and doctoral thesis in the universities under MOHS.

- It is worthwhile to analyze in terms of several parameters on all these studies and projects carried out during the last 5 years or so.
- The Department of Medical Research may wish to develop a “Framework of Analysis” together with required guidelines and share it with respective universities for analyzing it.
- The findings of this review will be very beneficial as an input to strategizing future directions of our health research domain.
- I would also like to propose DMR to do “Health Research Resource Flow Analysis”. Resource means human resource as well as financial resource.
- In conclusion, I just would like to propose the researchers.
- “Let us do research together to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our health care delivery system on our path to UHC and achieving SDG through application of relevant research findings”.
- I would like to end my remarks by saying that “Research is a very powerful tool for overall development of the country encompassing health, economic, social wellbeing and we should be using this tool as a matter of routine nature of our work.
- Thank you.