

History Of Medicine In Singapore

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When Singapore celebrated its centenary on the 6th of February 1919, the occasion was commemorated by the publication of a book entitled "One Hundred Years of Singapore"⁽¹⁾. This handsome book consists of 2 volumes⁽¹⁾; it is truly worthy of the occasion and in terms of facts, figures, photographs, illustrations, quality of printing etc, it has few comparables before or since. Perhaps, the only book that outshines "One Hundred Years of Singapore"⁽¹⁾ in terms of photography and quality of printing is "Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya" published slightly earlier in 1908⁽²⁾.

In "One Hundred Years of Singapore", Dr Gilbert E Brooke described the medical history of Singapore from 1819 to 1919⁽³⁾. Few of us would know that the first head of the medical department in Singapore was Dr Thomas Prendergast (he was Assistant in The General Hospital, Penang, April 1817 and Acting Surgeon-in-charge, Singapore and troops) and the last head at the close of the first 100 years was Dr Sidney Herbert Reginald Lucy (1918, 20th July, Principal Chief Medical Officer, Straits Settlements)⁽³⁾.

A present day medical historian in the tradition of Dr Gilbert E Brooke is Dr Lee Yong Kiat; his latest publication on "A brief introduction to the early history of surgery in Singapore" appears in the Singapore Medical Journal⁽⁴⁾. Dr Lee has published extensively on the medical history of early Singapore; some of these publications have been incorporated into his magnum opus "The Medical History of Early Singapore" published in 1978⁽⁵⁾ by the Southeast Asian Medical Information Center, Tokyo. This book has 338 pages and includes detailed studies on the Medical Education in the Straits Settlements (1786-1871); The General Hospital in Early Singapore (1819-1869); The Pauper and Tan Tock Seng Hospitals and Lunatic Asylum in Early Singapore; smallpox, cholera, leprosy and Quarantine in Early Singapore (1819-1874); the origins of the Municipal Health Department, Singapore and the First Anaesthetic in the Straits Settlements in 1847⁽⁵⁾.

While the early medical history of Singapore is well recorded by Dr Gilbert E Brooke⁽³⁾ and Dr Lee Yong Kiat^(4,5) there is scanty publication on doctors and medical practice during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945) when Singapore was renamed Syonan (Syo is "bright" or "brilliant" or "brilliance" and Nan means "South"; Syonan means "brilliant South", by the Nipponese

Government⁽⁶⁾. Although only 50 years have lapsed since the end of the Japanese Occupation, few doctors in Singapore know or remember that during the Japanese Occupation, Kandang Kerbau Hospital was renamed Chuo Byoin; while Tan Tock Seng Hospital was known as Hakuai Byoin and Woodbridge Hospital was called Miyako Byoin. The Dohjin Hospital was a private hospital in Middle Road that catered for the prewar Japanese population⁽⁷⁾.

The chaotic state of the hospitals in Malaya and Singapore prior to and after the Japanese invasion was described by Dr RB MacGregor in 1949⁽⁸⁾. Dr LS da Silva (1986)⁽⁹⁾ recalled the evacuation of The Singapore General Hospital (taken over by the Japanese military) to Woodbridge Hospital (Miyako Byoin) and later on to Tan Tock Seng Hospital (Hakuai Byoin). Dr LS da Silva⁽⁹⁾ recorded that Dr Kozo Ando (a Japanese who graduated from the local medical school; then called The Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School in March 1912 and had a clinic in Middle Road before the war⁽⁹⁾) who was in charge of the Civilian Medical Department in Syonan, helped the civilian hospitals and sick. The kindness showed by Dr Kozo Ando was collaborated by Dr JB Van Cuylenburg⁽⁷⁾ and Dr Khoo Oon Teik⁽¹⁰⁾. Dr TJ Danaraj (1990)⁽¹¹⁾ also wrote of his experience in the early days of the fall of Singapore. In a semi-autobiography, He Wen-Lit⁽¹²⁾ (Ho Boon Liat) also recorded his experience and medical practice in Syonan. Much of the medical history of Syonan remains to be written.

The founding of the Medical School and its early history have been recorded in detail by Dr Gilbert E Brooke⁽³⁾ and Dr Lee Yong Kiat⁽⁵⁾. When the Medical School began on 3rd July 1905 it was known as "The Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School"; its name was changed to "King Edward VII Medical School, Singapore" in 1913. In 1949, the College of Medicine amalgamated with the Raffles College to become the University of Malaya and became its Faculty of Medicine. In 1962 it became the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Singapore which in 1982 became the National University of Singapore. Its recent history has been recorded in publications marking its 50th⁽¹³⁾ and 90th⁽¹⁴⁾ anniversaries.

Very little has been written about student life in the early days of the Medical School: a notable exception is that written by Dr A Viswalingam⁽¹⁵⁾ who graduated in March 1913.

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When Singapore celebrated its centenary in 1919, "One Hundred Years of Singapore" was published; this book consists of 2 volumes and is truly worthy of the occasion. In "One Hundred Years of Singapore" the history of Medicine and the Medical School was described in detail⁽³⁾. When Singapore reached its 150th anniversary, a book entitled "The First 150 years of Singapore" was published by Donald and Joanna Moore⁽¹⁶⁾; this book omitted completely the medical history of Singapore. Hopefully when Singapore celebrates its bicentenary in 2019, a book worthy of comparison to its centenary book, will be published; which among other topics, would also record its medical history.

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CORRIGENDUM

The Editor of the SMJ wishes to apologise for the following inadvertent error:

The Abstract and Keywords for Clinics in Diagnostic Imaging (24), which were left out in the April issue of the Journal [Singapore Med J 1994; 38(4):172-176] is printed herein.

ABSTRACT

A 59-year-old man presented with neck pain and limb numbness. He also had bilateral symmetrical joint deformities of his hands and wrists. Cervical spine radiographs showed C1/2 instability and features of rheumatoid arthritis. Magnetic resonance imaging demonstrated erosion of the odontoid peg by pannus. C1/2 surgical fusion was performed. The role of imaging in cervical spine involvement by rheumatoid arthritis is reviewed.

Keywords: cervical spine, instability, odontoid peg, magnetic resonance imaging, rheumatoid arthritis