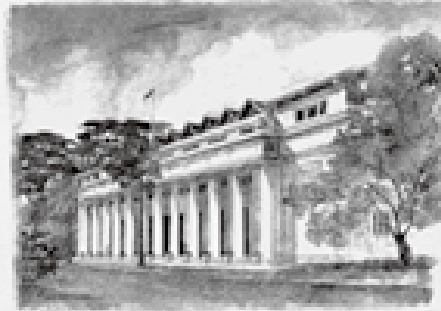


Nursing and the beginnings of specialised nursing in early Singapore

Y K Lee



The origin of professional nursing in Singapore has already been documented⁽¹⁾. A brief recapitulation is a necessary introduction to this article. In this article, the word “nurse” is used in a technical sense, and refers specifically to a female (nowadays, a male too) who has been carefully selected and systematically and professionally trained, and the care she lavished on the patients (usually in the hospital setting) is referred to as “nursing”. The hospitals started by using untrained females to help look after female patients, and then gradually having professional nurses to tend to all patients.

When Sir Stamford Raffles landed in Singapore on January 28, 1819, there was a medical detachment with his troops. This military medical team was all male and consisted of a doctor, dressers and orderlies. They were responsible for the health of the expedition. The first hospital established in Singapore was the Military Hospital, and the nursing there was carried out by the dressers and orderlies assisted by patients who were not too ill. A dresser was a Surgeon’s assistant (some sort of male nurse) whose duty was to dress wounds and sores. Later, when civil hospitals and lunatic asylums were established, they had the same grades of staff except that the subordinate members were convicts from India (Singapore was then a penal colony for Indian convicts).

In the early Singapore hospitals, there was no need for female staff as women in those days did not go to hospitals. They were treated at home and gave birth to their children at home. Later developments in Singapore included an increase in the population with a change in the sex ratio. Although the population was still overwhelmingly male, there were greater numbers of women. There were also more hospitals, and when women began to be admitted into them, the problem of how to care for them arose. In 1856, when plans were made to build a new General Hospital and a new Lunatic Asylum in the Kandang Kerbau district, there were provisions for the treatment of female patients

(The old hospital and lunatic asylum did not have wards for women). But the post for a female attendant was not approved.

In June 1861, patients from Tan Tock Seng Hospital at Pearl’s Hill were moved to the new Tan Tock Seng Hospital situated at Balestier Plain. Although this new hospital had a female ward (built from funds specially donated by Mrs Tan Tock Seng), no arrangements had been made to staff it with women:

“We have of late been much inconvenienced by the want of a female attendant at the Women’s Ward, their diseases being of that nature that such is indispensable. Dr Cowpar has suggested that one of the convict women should be attached to the ward as a nurse. If one could be got to undertake the duty it would be a great blessing to the poor bedridden creatures.”

(In those early times, the word “nurse” used in official letters and reports referred to a female who helped to care for the sick and infirm, not a professionally qualified nurse.)

By 1866, there was still no female attendant in the General Hospital, although returns in the Annual Report showed that patients had been treated for gynaecological complaints or had given birth there.

Another attempt was made to get a female attendant in January 1867. It was suggested that she should work in both the General Hospital and the Lunatic Asylum for 22 rupees per month (in those days rupees and dollars were both legal tender in Singapore):

“The nurse though attached to the Lunatic Asylum would be required to attend equally upon the patients in the adjoining General Hospital as upon the Insanes. At present, the only attendants at both the institutions are male convicts. There are always at one or the other of the two institutions patients in the female wards, and it is consequently highly desirable for many reasons that a nurse should be entertained for the purpose of taking charge of them.”

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This time, the proposal was approved, and for the first time in Singapore's history, a female employee worked in the Medical Department.

In 1873, there was a cholera epidemic in Singapore. It started in the Kandang Kerbau district where the General Hospital and Lunatic Asylum were situated. Patients from the General Hospital were quickly moved to the Sepoy Lines. After the epidemic was contained, the patients did not return to the General Hospital as the Kandang Kerbau district was considered unhealthy. They remained in the Sepoy Lines, part of which was converted into a temporary hospital. A new General Hospital and a new Lunatic Asylum were erected in the Sepoy Lines locality. The new General Hospital was opened on August 1, 1882, and professional nursing in Singapore owed its origins to the men who planned the building and staffing of this hospital.

By this time (the 1870s and early 1880s), there were already schools of nursing in the United Kingdom. The most famous one, the Nightingale Training School at St Thomas' Hospital, London, had been founded in 1860. The British doctors who had trained in the United Kingdom, and who staffed and administered the Medical Service in Singapore, knew of professional nursing, and they wanted it for the Singapore hospitals, especially the new General Hospital. But their pleas and recommendations fell on the deaf ears of the administrators. They were told that it would be difficult to recruit nurses from the United Kingdom to serve in Singapore, and to wait and see if the new General Hospital could function without nurses, as had been the usual practice.

In 1883, the Principal Civil Medical Officer (PCMO) (the equivalent of today's Director of Medical Services) and the Surgeon in charge of the General Hospital tried again. In their reports, they stated that the nursing in the General Hospital was done by the hospital servants, and severe cases were nursed by the Apothecaries and Dressers, helped by other less-ill patients. This was unacceptable. They proposed that nurses should be recruited from England or Madras, which the PCMO preferred, but was not attainable. Some other alternative had to be found:

"The absence of proper nursing is a great evil, and is especially felt by the inmates of the Officers' Ward. For ordinary nursing wants, the patients are dependent on the Chinese servants, and the bad cases are nursed by the Ward Steward, Apothecaries and Dressers (who all have quite enough of their own work to attend to), helped sometimes by other patients. I think that this hospital, considering its size and importance,

and probably increasing future usefulness, should be provided with a female nursing staff. With regard to the class of women to be chosen, I would recommend that they be selected in England from a good training school such as the Nightingale Institution at St Thomas's Hospital or some similar place. The advantages to the patients and to the Surgeon in charge of the hospital, as well as to the Apothecaries and Dressers, from the appointment of nurses would be considerable."

"I have been in communication with the Matron of the Madras Infirmary to see whether we could not be supplied with trained hospital nurses from that town, but the reply received was to the effect that, though they are to be had easily enough, they cannot be induced to leave their country for the Straits. This is a pity as the style of nurses procurable from Madras would probably, for climatic and other reasons, be found in the long run to suit us better than we could obtain from England. I trust, however, that early steps will now be taken to supply us in the best possible way with a staff of efficient nurses."

Although the Government considered it uneconomical to recruit nurses from the United Kingdom, and with nurses from Madras refusing to come to Singapore, the Governor was convinced of the need for better nursing and of having trained nurses in the General Hospital. He instructed his officials to study the problem and come up with something practical. The proposed plan was to recruit nuns from the Convent in Singapore (subject to certain conditions) and train them locally, as it was not possible to obtain nurses from the United Kingdom or Madras. The nuns were the only better-educated European women in Singapore prepared to do this type of work, as the majority of the other European women were wives or daughters of Government officials, prosperous merchants and professional men.

The proposal was approved by the Governor, and immediately stirred up a hornet's nest among the Protestant English population and included a member of the Legislative Council and the Chief Justice, who voiced their opposition violently at the Legislative Council meeting of November 18, 1884. They wanted to know why nurses could not be recruited from the United Kingdom, especially when there was unemployment there. The Chief Justice was more vehement in his protests. He strongly objected to the nursing in the hospitals being under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholics. He was sure that the loyalties of the Convent Sisters would be with the Church and not the Government, and

that eventually the Roman Catholic Bishop would take over control of the Medical Services!

There was even a public meeting held by 144 European residents to protest against the scheme to provide the hospitals with nurses from the Convent. Despite the opposition, the scheme was put into operation and the nuns assumed their duties as nurses in the General Hospital on August 1, 1885 (exactly three years after the hospital was officially opened). The Resident Surgeon of the General Hospital (Dr Simon) was satisfied with their work in 1885. The administration of the wards improved, and the Surgeon and Apothecaries appreciated their assistance in the treatment of bad cases.

In 1886, the nuns continued their housekeeping duties and on-the-job training in the practical aspects of nursing. The Resident Surgeon had plans for a more organised course of training including lectures. 1887 and 1888 saw the nuns continuing to work satisfactorily and conscientiously carrying out instructions given to them. In 1890, the Resident Surgeon wrote: "The Sisters have worked well during the year and given every satisfaction."

But trouble was brewing. The disciplinary problems predicted by the Chief Justice arose. The Mother Superior of the Convent refused to acknowledge the PCMO's authority to promote and deploy the Sisters. (The nuns were, of course, under a vow of strict obedience to their Order and Church).

In 1899, when the nun who performed the duties of Head Nurse, General Hospital, resigned, the PCMO selected her successor. The Mother Superior objected and, in defiance of the PCMO's authority, selected her own appointee. This put the PCMO's back up. As neither he nor the Mother Superior was willing to concede, there was an impasse. The PCMO reported this bold challenge to his authority to the Governor stressing that the state of affairs was not conducive to good patient care, and that there was no alternative but to terminate the agreement and make arrangements to recruit nurses from England⁽²⁾:

"On the resignation of Sister St Andre as Head Nurse, Sister St Apoline, the Head Nurse at the Penang General Hospital, was selected by the Medical Department as her successor. On the request being referred to the Lady Superior of the Singapore Convent, it was refused, and one of the Ward Sisters, St Eusebe, took up the duties for a time. She was an excellent Ward Nurse in every way, but was unfamiliar with the duties of Head Nurse, and her health had been failing for some time. She succumbed to phthisis on the 30th April.

As a successor to Sister St Eusebe, the Lady Superior of the Convent selected Sister St Clare, who it so happened, was the only Sister of English nationality

in the hospital, and this Sister continued to act as Head Nurse until the end of the year. The conditions under which the nursing was carried out were not, however, satisfactory, and early in this year, the Lady Superior, finding that she could no longer undertake to fulfil the conditions to which the Convent had agreed originally, either as regards the supply of an efficient Head Sister who should have absolute control over the other Sisters or as to keeping up the full number of the nurses required on the staff, asked to be relieved of the work of nursing at the General Hospital. Arrangements have accordingly been made to procure a staff of nurses (to be supplemented by local probationers) from England, and the Convent here will continue the nursing until these nurses arrive."

The PCMO also recommended that the nurses be recruited by the Colonial Nursing Institute (Association) on three-year renewable contracts. The Head Nurse and Senior Nurses were expected to train probationers⁽³⁾. (This shows that local nurses were being trained in the hospital although there was no proper Nursing School.)

The Colonial Secretary reported to the Legislative Council on February 27, 1900⁽⁴⁾.

"The Lady Superior of the Sisterhood having given notice that the present staff of Nurses supplied from the Convent will be withdrawn as soon as convenient to the Government, it is proposed to replace them by trained nurses from the Colonial Nursing Institute. The Secretary of State has been asked to send out six nurses, one of whom will be appointed Head Nurse. The nurses will be assisted by local probationers. For the present, the change will only affect the General Hospital, Singapore. The change will come in force when the new nurses arrive."

Four Nurses arrived on May 5, 1900, and commenced their duties and replaced the Roman Catholic nuns on May 14, 1900, on which date the Convent ceased to be responsible for the nursing arrangements in the General Hospital. They were designated "Nursing Sisters" and one of them was appointed "Head Nurse" to be in charge of the Nursing Staff. (This may appear rather puzzling, a "Head Nurse" being in charge of the "Nursing Sisters". In later years, the terminology was changed, and "Head Nurse" became "Matron".) Two other nurses were expected later⁽⁵⁾.

On July 12, 1900, the Secretary of State was informed that it was expedient to recruit two more English nurses to help teach the probationers and to cover leave, e.g. vacation leave, sick leave⁽⁶⁾. The staff was completed by the arrival of Sisters Knaggs and

Sharpe on November 3, 1900, and by then consisted of one Head Nurse, seven Sisters, one third-year Probationer, one second-year and three first-year Probationers, making a total nursing staff of thirteen⁽⁷⁾.

"This change from a comparatively untrained to a trained staff had naturally been productive of considerable benefit to the patients and of increased efficiency and order", reported the PCMO⁽⁷⁾.

Recruiting nurses from England had its problems. The staffing situation was precarious, and there was a constant shortage of staff as the Sisters left the Service for a number of reasons and replacements from England took time to arrive. Some of the Sisters were susceptible to diseases uncommon in England, and others soon found husbands among the European men in Singapore. In May 1901, Miss Sharpe, one of the nurses who had arrived on November 3, 1900, was found medically unfit for further service in the tropics and was given a free passage home to England in July⁽⁸⁾. In the same month, Miss Wreford, another nurse, gave notice of her intention to resign her appointment on November 30, 1901 to get married. The Secretary of State was asked to select suitable candidates to fill the vacancies⁽⁹⁾.

Two new Probationers were taken on during the year⁽¹⁰⁾. Most of the Nursing Staff were sick during the year, but none seriously except for Sister Sharpe⁽¹⁰⁾. On the whole, the PCMO was quite satisfied with the General Hospital "where the administration is now placed on a higher scale due chiefly to the excellent Nursing Staff which this hospital now possesses⁽¹⁰⁾."

One of the advantages that the nuns possessed was that not being English, they could speak other European languages and communicate with the European sailors when they were admitted to hospital. This need was soon felt, and the Secretary of State was requested to recruit a nurse who could speak "French, German or some other European language⁽¹¹⁾."

In 1902, certain improvements were made in the General Hospital to improve the living and working conditions of the Sisters. (This quotation gives us a glimpse of what conditions were like)⁽¹²⁾:

"A shed with tanks for the Dhobies (laundrymen) was made in the low ground in front of the European block in order that the noise of clothes beating (this was how clothes were washed in the old days) might be removed from the near vicinity of the Officers' Wards and the Nurses' Sleeping Quarters (so that their rest would not be disturbed).

The Night Soil Shed was moved from near the Nurses' Sleeping Quarters to near the Mortuary. (Night soil = human waste, excrement. Night Soil

Shed = a shed where the excreta from the toilets were kept until collected at fixed times usually at night. A very smelly place. There was no flush system then).

The Nurses' kitchen in the European block was made mosquito-proof. A Mosquito Tent was made for the Night Nurse in Native Ward I. (Evidently the nurse sat in this tent unless she was doing her rounds or tending to a patient)."

Not only was there a high turnover of Nursing Sisters, the situation was similar where the Probationers were concerned. Three Probationers left during the year and were replaced by three inexperienced ones⁽¹²⁾.

In 1903, a new PCMO, Dr D K McDowell, was appointed. After arrival in Singapore, he inspected the General Hospital and did not like the nursing arrangements and discipline. He instituted new rules which the nurses took exception to. The Head Nurse, Miss Bothwell, and Sister Stacy resigned in protest and left Singapore in August⁽¹³⁾. Miss Constance Trevelyan Hawdon arrived and assumed the duties of Head Nurse on December 3, 1903⁽¹⁴⁾.

In 1903, an European Attendant (Male Nurse) was appointed to look after the European male patients in the Lunatic Asylum. He was incompetent and the Medical Superintendent, Dr W G Ellis, was not happy with him⁽¹⁴⁾:

"An European Attendant, long needed, arrived in October, and took charge of the European Cottage. I was greatly disappointed that his lunacy experience was so little, as I had especially requested that a thoroughly trained man with several years service be sent to me."

In January 1904, the Head Nurse, Miss Hawdon was transferred to the Penang General Hospital, and Miss Cassells succeeded her on January 31, 1904 and resigned on May 28, 1904. Miss M J McNair was appointed acting Head Nurse in her place, and was confirmed in the appointment on August 1, 1904⁽¹⁵⁾.

In 1904, the Nurses' Quarters in the General Hospital were partially demolished, reconstructed and enlarged⁽¹⁵⁾. Chicks (screens made of bamboo strips, which are suspended and can be rolled up and down) were fixed around the Night Nurses' Quarters because of complaints made of there being too much light; and a railing erected around the building to prevent too easy access from outside. Nurses were also posted to the Quarantine Station on St John's Island to look after the sick among those quarantined. Quarters for two nurses were built⁽¹⁵⁾.

In 1905, owing to the large number of European patients in the Lunatic Asylum, it was deemed

advisable to obtain two more European Attendants, in addition to Attendant Johnson engaged in 1903, from some of the English asylums. Messers H Grimshaw (from Winwick) and M J M Niall (from Bexley Heath) arrived on June 23, and July 5, 1905, respectively. The Medical Superintendent was satisfied with their work in every way⁽¹⁶⁾.

When Mrs Hartnell, the Matron of the Female Lunatic Asylum, went on leave prior to retirement in March 1906, the Governor requested the Secretary of State to select a successor in November. What is instructive and interesting was that the PCMO had advised the Governor that under local conditions, a tough, resourceful and educated woman was preferable to a trained Psychiatric Nurse. (The Female Asylum was then at Pasir Panjang)⁽¹⁷⁾:

"The Female Asylum in Singapore is situated 5½ miles from the Town and is quite isolated, the patients and attendants speak various Oriental languages and no English. The only other residential officer is an Eurasian English-speaking Dresser, and the quarters are a thatched wooden house. In these circumstances, I am strongly advised that a strong-minded, well-educated woman with no Asylum experience would be more suitable than the ordinary type of Asylum Nurse as the latter would probably soon leave the Service and the former can easily be trained."

The new Maternity Block of the General Hospital was opened on December 1, 1908, and the Matron of the Victoria Street Free Maternity Hospital was transferred to be the Matron of this new Maternity Block⁽¹⁸⁾. The post of Matron of the Maternity Wards was a senior one, because when the Head Nurse of the General Hospital went on leave, the Matron of the Maternity Wards acted for her during her absence⁽¹⁹⁾. A new European Attendant, Mr Kerr, came out from England towards the latter end of 1909⁽¹⁹⁾.

There was a constant change of nurses. Many left and had to be replaced by new nurses from England. In August 1910, the Governor wrote to the Secretary of State regarding the shortage of nurses in the General Hospital. He was informed that nurses were leaving for a number of reasons: end of contract; not returning from leave in England; leaving to get married and for other personal reasons; work and conduct unsatisfactory and either dismissed or services not retained after expiry of the three-year agreement; or medically boarded out because of ill-health, e.g. pulmonary tuberculosis⁽²⁰⁾.

In 1910, the Government appalled by the horrendous infant mortality rate (264 per 1000 live

births in 1909) decided that positive action had to be taken. A special Infant Welfare programme was instituted. Nurses were appointed for this special duty and training of local midwives started⁽²¹⁾:

"A Nurse to help instruct native mothers in the proper care of their infants with the hope of reducing the large infant mortality was appointed during the year in Singapore and is under Municipal control. During the year, a scheme was formulated and passed for the training of native midwives, the Government paying for the cost of tuition and the Municipality the uniform and subsistence money for the pupils. The scheme provides for the training of four pupils and of these two passed out by the end of the year."

The scheme was expanded in 1911. Home Visitors were appointed, and they visited homes of babies whose births had been reported daily to the Registrar of Births. A Midwives' Ordinance was also proposed⁽²²⁾:

"In the hope of lowering this large death rate among infants, female inspectors have been attached to the Municipal Health Department, and visit homes to advise mothers concerning the care of infants. A daily list of births is sent to the Registrar of Births for their information. With a similar hope it is proposed to license native midwives, when a sufficient number have qualified, under a special ordinance to be framed for the purpose to the exclusion of the present unlicensed and untrained practitioners. Under the Scheme for midwives started last year, 6 women were in training during the year, of whom 4 obtained certificates of competency."

But the going was slow. In 1910, the infant mortality rate was 269 per 1000 live births, and in 1911, it was 270 per 1000 live births.

Working in Singapore in those early days was quite hazardous. In 1911, no less than seven Sisters and six Nurse Probationers were admitted to hospital, five due to malaria. As the total nursing staff of the General Hospital was ten Sisters and 13 Probationers, this represented a very high percentage of sickness particularly when the staff had been medically examined and passed as fit before being employed, and that none of the Sisters had been more than two years in Singapore⁽²²⁾.

The infant mortality rate in 1912 was 267 per 1000. The Infant Welfare Nurses were having a tough time. Unqualified midwives and ignorance of the mothers especially as to the proper feeding of infants, were largely responsible for the existing conditions. The PCMO reported⁽²³⁾:

"It is a common practice to dump infants in all stages of neglect and disease at the Convent gates in the night; of such, 300 died in the course of the year.

The chief causes of infant mortality are inexperience, ignorance and neglect of mothers; improper food and overcrowding with its consequent poor hygiene. As I stated in my report for the previous year, we are doing our utmost by the training of native midwives and by the appointment of female inspectors to the Municipal Health Department to educate the mothers, not an easy matter considering the many races we have to deal with and their many prejudices."

During the year, 13 Sisters and nine Nurse Probationers were admitted to hospital, 18 cases for Malaria⁽²³⁾.

In 1913, a new appointment of Housekeeper for the Nurses' Hostel was created, and one Mrs Joyce was appointed on March 1, but she resigned on November 15, when she was succeeded by Miss O'Malley⁽²⁴⁾. Because more Europeans were admitted to the General Hospital with mental symptoms, an European Attendant was obtained from England "for the better nursing of delirious and observation European patients in the General Hospital" in 1913⁽²⁴⁾. European Attendant M J Niall was appointed Lay Superintendent of St John's Quarantine Station in November 1913⁽²⁵⁾. A replacement was required in the Lunatic Asylum. This time the particulars of office stated that the applicant had to have the Nursing Certificate of the Psychological Association⁽²⁶⁾.

At Tan Tock Seng Hospital, a new scheme for training Dressers for whom there was a great demand, was proposed towards the end of 1913 and came into operation on January 1, 1914. An Assistant Surgeon was appointed as Tutor and a Nursing Sister was seconded to undertake the training in Nursing. A Dresser was somewhat similar to a Male Nurse. A large staff of Dressers were employed in posts such as Dispensers, Laboratory Assistants, in venereal diseases wards and clinics, outdoor dispensaries and male wards in hospitals⁽²⁴⁾.

At the end of 1913, a new scheme for the training of Probationers was introduced together with a new provision for some of them who were not good enough to be Sisters⁽²⁷⁾:

<i>"Salaries of</i>	<i>– 1st year</i>	<i>– \$180 per annum.</i>
<i>Nurse Probationers</i>	<i>– 2nd year</i>	<i>– \$300 per annum.</i>
	<i>– 3rd year</i>	<i>– \$360 per annum.</i>
	<i>– 4th year</i>	<i>– \$480 per annum.</i>

Examination after the 4th year.

Appointment as Staff Nurses for European and Eurasian Probationers not good enough to be 'Sisters'.

Must have had at least 70% of marks.

Salary \$600 p.a. with yearly increment of \$60 p.a. to \$780 p.a."

When World War I broke out in 1914, patriotic nurses volunteered for service in the Armed Forces. One was Miss M J McNair, Head Nurse, General Hospital, who was granted permission to proceed on active duty under the War Office for one year. She became a Sister in the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service, and did duty at the Military Hospital in York, England⁽²⁸⁾. But not many Sisters could be spared for "war service".

Because of the War, there was a lack of qualified people to fill the posts in the Nursing Service. In April 1916, another Housekeeper, General Hospital, was appointed. She was Miss M A Pasea, who had some training at the London Hospital and had passed a practical and theoretical examination in Cookery⁽²⁹⁾. She resigned in June, and Miss Bertha Willis was appointed on three months' probation. She had "no technical qualifications, but she is the only suitable candidate for the appointment⁽³⁰⁾."

On April 11, 1916, the Governor wrote to the Secretary of State for permission to appoint a new Matron, Free Maternity Hospital, in place of Mrs Amery who had resigned. (Mrs Amery before her appointment had been employed by the King Edward VII Medical School and was in charge of the External Midwifery Department where medical students had part of their training.) This despatch is quoted as it gives an insight into conditions then⁽³¹⁾:

"Sir, I have the honour to inform you that subject to your approval, I have appointed Mrs Ethel Winifred Henderson to the post of Matron, Free Maternity Hospital, Victoria Street, Singapore, with effect from 1st April 1916, in place of Mrs Amery who has resigned.

Before her marriage, Mrs Henderson was a nurse in the General Hospital, Singapore, for 3½ years. After her marriage she worked for about a year in the General Hospital Maternity Wards, where she obtained a certificate of competency, and was reported upon most highly both as to character and ability. Lately she has been practising as a "monthly nurse", and is recommended by two of the best known doctors in Singapore.

The appointment is on the non-pensionable establishment, and carries a salary of £130 p.a. rising by annual increments of £10 p.a. to £190 p.a. with a duty allowance of £20 p.a."

During the War, the Nursing Staff was in a seriously depleted state. It was difficult to get replacements from

England as nurses were required for war service. Miss M J McNair, Head Nurse, General Hospital, retired in May 1918, and Miss A Boyes succeeded her⁽³²⁾. After the War, there were plans for rehabilitation, upgrading and expansion in the Medical Services. We will here restrict ourselves to the Nursing Service.

In February 1920, the Principal Civil Medical Officer recommended that the post of Housekeeper, General Hospital, be upgraded and the title changed to "Home Sister". Better qualifications were required. The post was to be filled by a senior Nursing Sister who was capable of maintaining discipline in the Nurses' Hostel and of acting as Matron of the Hospital when the Matron went on leave⁽³³⁾. In September 1920, the basic qualifications needed to be appointed a Nursing Sister was raised to include a "Certificate of full training as a Nurse including experience in nursing midwifery patients⁽³⁴⁾."

It was also in 1920, that a Select Committee of the Legislative Council recommended that from 1921, the designation of Head Nurses be changed and their salaries increased⁽³⁵⁾:

"We consider that the Head Sisters of the General Hospitals, Singapore and Penang, should be called 'Matrons Class I'; that the Home Sister of the General Hospital should be called 'Assistant Matron' and the Head Sister of the Kangas Kerbau Hospital, the Matron of the Lunatic Asylum and the Matron of the Maternity Hospital, Victoria Street, should be called 'Matron Class II'.

*Matron Class I \$250 – \$10 – \$350 p.m.
 (from \$220 – \$10 – \$300 p.m.)*

*Matron Class II. \$200 – \$10 – \$250 p.m.
 (from \$170 – \$10 – \$220 p.m.)"*

In May 1922, there was a request by the General Nursing Council in London for information regarding registration of nurses in the Dominions in connection with the Nurses' Registration Act 1919⁽³⁶⁾. They were informed that there was no law for the registration of Nurses although there was an ordinance for the registration of Midwives⁽³⁷⁾.

Miss E M Fletcher in October 1922 was promoted Matron, General Hospital vice Miss A Boyes, who retired⁽³⁸⁾. In May 1923, a scheme for the re-organisation of the local Nursing Service, including Midwifery, was proposed⁽³⁹⁾. It was approved by the Secretary of State on August 15, 1923⁽⁴⁰⁾.

A new General Hospital was being built to replace the one in use since 1882. In anticipation of the increased workload, eight more Nursing Sisters were required. The Secretary of State was

asked to recruit them in March 1925. Later the request was increased to 11⁽⁴¹⁾.

A Nurse for the School Health Service was proposed when the Secretary of State's Advisory Medical and Sanitary Committee recommended:

"The provision of a School Nurse is also very necessary, as advice is of little value if the treatment recommended cannot be carried out⁽⁴²⁾."

It was also decided to widen the scope of the Health Branch of the Medical Department in May 1926. Three Nursing Sisters were requested for "District Nursing, Child Welfare and Health Prophylaxis in the rural areas." Two were to come to Singapore via the USA to study Public Health Nursing there first. Their expenses would be paid for by the Rockefeller Foundation⁽⁴³⁾.

In July 1926, the Governor requested the Secretary of State, when next recruiting Nursing Sisters, to include one who was a trained masseuse as there were plans to start a Physiotherapy Department⁽⁴⁴⁾. (There were no physiotherapists as such in those days and Nursing Sisters with the necessary qualifications did specialised jobs. Another example was the appointment of suitably qualified Nursing Sisters as radiographers – see below):

"Request 8 additional posts of Nursing Sisters because of the greatly increased accommodation at the new General Hospital which was opened recently. One should be a trained masseuse. Masseuse's work will be general nursing, and massage when required."

In 1926, a new post of Matron, Grade II, Tan Tock Seng Hospital, was created to remedy the low standard of nursing in the hospital. The Dressers needed some discipline. Soon "the nursing there which was formerly carried out by Dressers without female supervision has since improved considerably⁽⁴⁵⁾".

In those times, racial discrimination was very blatant. For an European to be considered an equal to members of the local population was an insult. In March 1927, an English Staff Nurse who was not good enough to be a Nursing Sister bypassed the regular channels of communication and wrote directly to the Secretary of State asking to be promoted. In her letter, she said that she had the same standing as the Natives – Eurasians, Siamese, Tamils and Chinese! She had stuck it out because the post was pensionable. Young Nursing Sisters of 26 years of age were her seniors although she had 11 years service. She was not promoted⁽⁴⁶⁾.

The new General Hospital (to replace the one in use since 1882) was officially opened on March 29, 1926. One consequence of this was the increased

volume of work all round, including the X-ray Department. The Radiologist in charge, because of the expansion of the X-ray Department, requested supporting professional staff urgently. The Governor in a telegraphic despatch on June 14, 1927 to the Secretary of State stated⁽⁴⁷⁾:

"Please engage two Nursing Sisters. One should possess the Assistant Radiographer's Certificate and also the Certificate of Medical Electricity of either Guy's Hospital or University College, London."

This was the start of having trained radiographers in the X-ray Department although there was no such entity in existence then. Specially-qualified Nursing Sisters were deployed for this work.

The Secretary of State replied on August 13, 1927⁽⁴⁸⁾:

"Selected Miss M B Hornsby as a Nursing Sister. Possesses the Certificate of Radiography and Medical Electricity of Guy's Hospital. Hours of work should be different from ordinary Nursing Sisters."

Matron E M Fletcher died of peritonitis on November 21, 1926⁽⁴⁹⁾.

The Governor kept on asking for more Nursing Sisters to be recruited from England. One reason being⁽⁵⁰⁾.

"An insufficiency of suitable local candidates for the appointment of 'Staff Nurse'. But it is anticipated that when the large number of Nurse Probationers, now employed in the new hospital, have received an adequate training it may be possible to recruit more Staff Nurses from their ranks, and make a corresponding reduction in the number of Nursing Sisters."

When the new Mental Hospital was about to be ready for occupation, it was decided that suitably qualified Psychiatric Nurses should be recruited, and in January 1928, the Governor requested the Secretary of State to recruit a Nursing Sister with Psychiatric Nursing qualifications⁽⁵¹⁾:

"Female portion of the hospital will be ready by the middle of the year. 100 female patients now at Tanjong Rambutan will return, making a total of 250 female patients with only one European nursing staff, the Matron."

Candidate must possess the Medico-Psychological Nursing Certificate, and also the Certificate in General Nursing. Need not have the Central Midwives' Board (CMB) Certificate."

Miss H F Priestley was appointed Nursing Sister in the Mental Hospital and given the grade of Assistant Matron on April 4, 1928⁽⁵²⁾. The scheme for locally-trained nurses approved in August 1923 was

found to be not attractive enough to retain the good nurses. The creation of a prize grade of Senior Staff Nurse was proposed on March 8, 1928. At that moment, there were 35 Staff Nurses on the existing salary scale of \$840 – \$120A – \$1440 p.a. There were to be five posts of Senior Staff Nurse on a higher scale of \$1560 – \$120A – \$1800 p.a.⁽⁵³⁾. This proposal was approved by the Secretary of State of April 21, 1928⁽⁵⁴⁾.

On July 20, 1928, instructions were received from the Secretary of State regarding retirement of Nursing Sisters. They were to retire at 45 instead of at 50 years of age⁽⁵⁵⁾. In 1929, the Matron of the General Hospital was Miss R Fenoulhet. She was succeeded by Miss M A S Law who retired in 1934. In 1930, the Nursing Services of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States were amalgamated to become the Malayan Nursing Service⁽⁵⁶⁾. When the Matron of the Mental Hospital retired, the Assistant Matron, Miss H F Priestley was promoted in September 1930, and a new psychiatrically-trained Nursing Sister, Miss M A McRobbie, was recruited and appointed Assistant Matron⁽⁵⁷⁾.

In the 1930s, the responsibility for Infant Welfare was divided between the Government and the Municipality⁽⁵⁸⁾. The Municipality which had its own health organisation, was responsible for the "Town" and the more urbanised areas. It had three clinics with District Sisters and Health Nurses, who conducted maternal and child welfare work, made house visits and also carried out a certain amount of maternity work in conjunction with the locally-trained midwives.

The Government was responsible for the rural area of Singapore which was divided into five sanitary districts with five centres. A brief description of the work is interesting and instructive:

"These centres are in charge of Rural Public Health Sisters recruited from England of whom there are one Matron and one Sister in Singapore. In addition there are in each centre, a resident Health Nurse, a midwife and a female attendant. The routine duties of the Health Sister and Nurses are primarily educational and preventive. They advise mothers on the care and feeding of infants and young children. They give ante-natal attention, and with the midwife deliver babies. They also detect abnormalities requiring medical treatment. They visit houses from which births have been reported and advise. The Health Sister keeps a register of the local midwives (bidans). She inspects the records of the births they have attended and instructs them in the elements of midwifery The Health Sister gives simple remedies for minor ailments. Cases of illness are referred to the

nearest Government Dispensary whenever possible. It has been found that the majority of Asiatic children are victims of ill-feeding, and are more in need of advice than of treatment."

The problem of Nursing Sisters finding husbands in Singapore and leaving the Service was perennial. In 1931, 12 Sisters resigned on account of marriage during the year; this number was higher than usual⁽⁵⁹⁾. In 1932, there was a proposal that the Nursing Sisters should learn "Malay, Tamil or other oriental languages for the performance of their duties." It was not implemented as it was not practical⁽⁶⁰⁾.

The 1930s saw further developments in specialised nursing. In May 1933, when there was a vacancy for a Nursing Sister, the Governor informed the Secretary of State that the replacement selected should have had training in the diseases of children. This was the first time Paediatric Nursing was ever mentioned officially⁽⁶¹⁾.

It was again reiterated in a telegram on March 14, 1934: "Please recruit seven Nursing Sisters. Essential one of them should have had training in the diseases of children⁽⁶²⁾."

In 1934, plans for future developments in 1935 were made. One was to establish a Nursing School with a full-time Tutor Sister⁽⁶³⁾:

"A Tutor Sister is to be engaged in 1935 who will devote all her time to the training of probationer nurses. It is hoped that it will then be possible to institute a Preliminary Training School for nurses, where candidates undergo a course of intensive training in the essential principles of nursing before being engaged as probationer nurses and posted for duty in the wards. Such a training school, attached to the General Hospital will serve a very useful purpose in selecting for the Nursing Service those who have a real aptitude for the vocation of nursing."

On June 13, 1935, the Governor wrote to the Secretary of State regarding arrangements for teaching nursing at the General Hospital, Singapore. He informed the Secretary of State that a Tutor Sister would be appointed in 1936, together with the establishment of a Nursing School. At that time, the teaching and training were carried out by the Matron, Sisters and Doctors, which was considered a waste of their time⁽⁶⁴⁾.

This proposal to appoint a Tutor Sister for the purpose of teaching nursing at the General Hospital, Singapore, was approved on July 24, 1935⁽⁶⁵⁾. Miss E M Fowler-Wright was appointed on the same salary scale as the Sister in the X-ray Department indicating that they were of the same grade: \$230 – \$10 – \$370 p.m.⁽⁶⁶⁾

But by that time, there was already a large staff of locally-trained nurses (without the benefit of a nursing school) who had undergone a course of training lasting four years. They had been successful in passing the examinations, became trained nurses, and eligible in the course of time for appointment as Staff Nurses and Senior Staff Nurses. A certain proportion of these nurses were attached to the Infant Welfare Centres and some were further trained in public health work⁽⁶⁷⁾. Other non-Government hospitals also had their own nurses' training programmes, e.g. St Andrew's Mission Hospital.

Another proposal made in 1934 was the development of a Physiotherapy Department. Although Nursing Sisters with experience as masseuses had previously been recruited to do part-time physiotherapy, this proposal was for a full-time Physiotherapy Department⁽⁶³⁾:

"Provision has been made in 1935 for the staffing and equipping on a modest scale of a physical therapy department in the General Hospital, Singapore. Much of the necessary equipment is already in existence. The additional staff comprises one Sister with special training, two Nurses for training as masseuses, one Dresser for training as masseur, and one male attendant and one female attendant. This modest beginning will, it is hoped, enable a number of patients to receive adequate skilled massage and other forms of physical treatment, thus hastening their recovery and discharge from hospital. In providing this new department the General Hospital is keeping pace with the progress made in modern methods of treatment."

In 1936, a Sister in charge of the Physical Therapy Department in the General Hospital, Singapore, was appointed on the same salary scale as the Tutor Sister and the Sister of the X-ray Department⁽⁶⁷⁾.

This was the nursing situation when the War with Japan broke out in 1941. During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, the local nurses proved their worth, without British Nursing Sisters supervising them. Nursing in Singapore gradually changed after the British re-occupied Singapore. Senior local nurses were appointed Nursing Sisters. The local nurses eventually took over the Nursing Service after Singapore became independent.

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