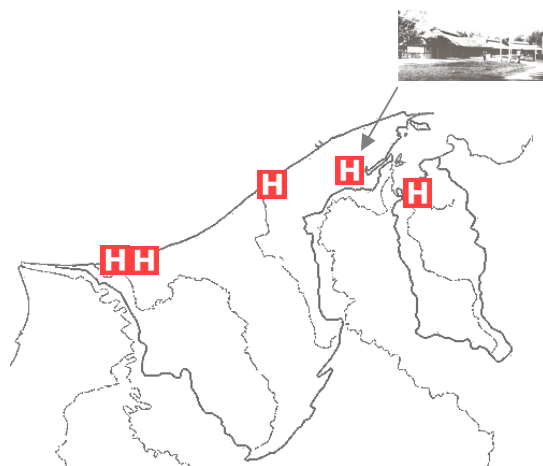


Healthcare in Brunei Darussalam: Hospitals and services before the Second World War



The first hospital to be built in Brunei was in Kuala Belait in 1925 by the prospecting petroleum company, the British Malayan Petroleum Company (BMPC), the forerunner of Brunei Shell. In 1929, the Pekan Brunei Hospital or 'Hospital Kajang', the first state hospital was officially opened in September of 1929. The population of Pekan Brunei at that time was estimated to be almost 30,000. Government healthcare extended to the other districts with the building of district hospitals. Hospitals were built in the Tutong (estimated population: 7,000) and Temburong (estimated population: 4,000) districts in 1933 and 1934 respectively. The hospitals were small, the size of a standard house at that time and were built using the same materials used for 'Hospital Kajang', wood, palm and nipah (kajang) leaves. Each hospital had six beds, a dispensary and a clinic and was manned by a dresser. The services provided were similar to those found in the Pekan Brunei Hospital: outpatient treatment for minor illnesses, vaccination service and in-patient treatment for more serious cases. Anyone who needed major treatment had to be transferred to the main Pekan Brunei hospital. Most of the cases were either infections or trauma.

In the Belait district, the government of His Highness Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Akhazul Khairi Wadin Ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Muhamad Jamalul Alam had an official agreement with the BMPC for their hospital to provide healthcare services to the non-BMPC employee patients at discounted fees. This hospital had two medical officers compared to one in the Pekan Brunei Hospital. This hospital, equipped with modern equipment, was considered the most advanced hospital at that time. This agreement carried on until a government hospital was built in 1936.

Over the years the number of attendances and admissions increased requiring the expansion of healthcare services. More dressers were recruited, the number of visits by the only State Medical Officer increased and 'Hospital Kajang' was expanded in 1937. At that time, there were no roads connecting the four districts. Even within Pekan Brunei, the infrastructure was minimal. Transportation was mainly by boat, bicycle or foot and took many hours. Further expansion of healthcare service did not occur until after the Second World War.