

## Healthcare Pioneers: The Nurses of Brunei Darussalam (Part II)



a) Loading of food to be transported to schools overseen by a Matron (School feeding scheme), b) Dispensing of food to pupils in the School feeding scheme.

In any healthcare system, nurses play a vital role in the delivering of medical and health services. A significant point in the history of nursing in Brunei was the training of two local women on 'ward utility' of Maternal and Child services in 1932. In 1933, a local Maternal and Child Nurse was appointed and another trained as probationer midwife. In 1936, seven male officers were engaged in this service. Two nurses were also trained to provide educational services for antenatal women. Importance was placed on midwifery due to the high obstetric complications and maternal and infant mortality rates.

Manpower in nursing increased from two dressers in 1923 to 20 nurses in 1953 and 92 qualified midwives in 1957. The number continued to increase along with the population and expansion of healthcare services and by 1992, there were 1,280 nurses and midwives. As of 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007, there were 1,801 nurses and midwives giving a ratio of 1 nurses to 195 persons, an increase from 1 to 2,500 in 1952.

In earlier times, nurses' roles were more

prominent as there were few other healthcare professionals or specialties. In the 1960s, with only a few doctors, the nurses played a very important role in care of patients similar to the role of dressers and surgeons. Among the services introduced by nurses was the school feeding scheme for school children to combat the problem of malnutrition.

Aside from Matron Hajjah Habibah (*Healthcare Pioneers: BIMJ. 2012; 8:230*), many others that included matrons, staff or assistant nurses and midwives have played important roles in the development of the Brunei Healthcare, many remaining unknown to the public.

As the population continued to increase, healthcare infrastructure expanded and the newer services introduced, the role of nurses become ever more important. Nurse are now going into dedicated specialty cares, and sub-specialisation into nurse specialists or practitioners such as Diabetic Nurse Educator, Cardiac Failure Nurses and Stoma Nurse. Nurses as a whole were truly pioneers in the healthcare in Brunei Darussalam.