

# Healthcare Pioneers: Yapp Khai Khoon



Yapp Khai Khoon performing a dental extraction during one of the visits to the rural areas.

Yapp Khai Khoon was one of the main persons involved with the Flying Doctor service in the history of Brunei Darussalam healthcare. He first got involved in the service when he was stationed in the Temburong district hospital between 1968 and 1969.

My Yapp enrolled into the Nursing School in March 1957 at the tender age of 19. He was the only one of seven siblings involved in the healthcare sector. He joined the service as he was interested to learn, in this case healthcare and at that time, the employment opportunity was good. His parents were from Southern China and his father was a shoemaker. He graduated in 1960 along with six others (Richard Chang, Roslyn Chia, Betty Ting, Theresa Chin, Jenny Tham and Cecilia Th'ng) to become one of the first graduates of a formalised training programme since the introduction of nursing training in the country. My Yapp was stationed in Kuala Belait Hospital (under Chong Ah Khow, dresser) for a year, then transferred to the Emergency Department of the Brunei General Hospital before transferring to the Temburong hospital.

Mr Yapp, along with his wife Teresa Lingam (from the federation state of Sabah, Malaya) regularly joined Dr William GC Fitzpatrick, an Irishman, on trips to the rural areas in the Temburong district. Dr Fitzpatrick later recruited Mr Yapp as a permanent assistant. Mr Yapp was later given the charge of the Flying Doctor service after the sudden passing of Dr Fitzpatrick and after working for several months with a temporary replacement doctor.

Mr Yapp was very dedicated to his work and also taught many nurses who had rotated through the Flying Doctor service. Among the patients he had treated, Mr Yapp remembers clearly a man with a foreign body (splinter of more than an inch long) with discharging sinus that he successfully removed from the foot and a lady with prolonged labour from the Belait district who delivered in the helicopter during an emergency call.

My Yapp retired from the service in July 1992 and currently resides with his family in Kampung Sungai Hanching. Mr Yapp was a true pioneer and the Doctor behind the Flying Doctor Service.

Guest editor: Dato Samuel Yapp Kai San (Senior Consultant Surgeon, RIPAS Hospital).

Sources: Newspaper cutting: Pelita Brunei