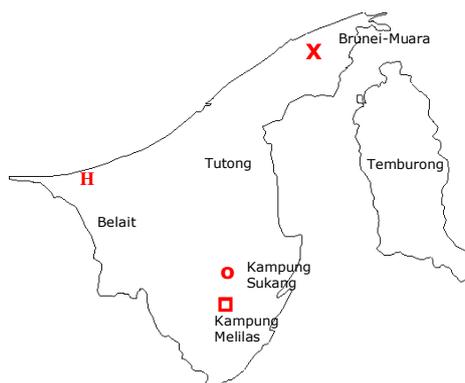


Healthcare in Brunei Darussalam: Flying Doctor Service (Part II)



The team boarding a helicopter (Bell) after completion of a clinic. Map of Brunei; H: Suri Seri Begawan Hospital and X: Army Airbase.

The Flying Doctor Service or Flying Medical Service represents an important part of the healthcare service of Brunei Darussalam. Since its introduction, many people living in the remote areas of the country have benefitted from the service. When the service started, communication was only by radio and to get to these areas, people had to trek for hours to days and travel by boat. Even now, there are still remote areas that are not easily accessible by road.

The team typically consists of a doctor, typically a Medical Officer from the Public Health Service, a Nurse-in-Charge and a nurse from the Mother and Child Service. Up until October 2012, a dentist provided two visits monthly and provided mostly dental checks and extractions. Since June 2004, a pharmacist or dispenser joined the service, but only to the Kampung Sukang Clinic.

Similar to the services provided in the earlier time, the current provision of care includes; a) Primary Health Care Service; health checks, management of minor illnesses, follow up on chronic disorders, and health promotions, b) Nursing

Service; minor procedures such as wound suturing and dressing, and incision and drainage, and c) Mother and Child Health Services; antenatal and postnatal checks, vaccinations and health service to children below the age of five. For complex stable cases, patients are usually requested to make their way to the closest hospital, the Suri Seri Begawan Hospital located in the Belait district. The team meets at the designated point at the Air Force Base 30 minutes before departure, usually at 8.30am. The helicopters used included Bell, Blackhawk and Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm Bo 105.

As infrastructure and communication improve, the number of villages that the Flying Doctor Service visit have decreased from more than 10 (1970s) to just two (2013), namely Kampung Sukang and Kampung Melilas. Services to Kampung Mapol and Kampung Supon Besar stopped in October 2012. The number of patients seen have also decreased (829 in 2008 to 396 in 2012). With further improvement in infrastructure and increase in the number of peripheral clinics, it is foreseen that the Flying Doctor or Flying Medical Service will no longer be required in the not too distant future.