

# Healthcare Pioneers: Dato I. G. Singh



Picture: Dato Singh (Centre) next to Dato Johar Bin Noordin (Director of Medical and Health services (1982-1986) and Minister of Health of Brunei Darussalam (1986-1997).

Dato I. G. Singh was the first psychiatrist in the State of Brunei. He was from New Delhi, India and joined the Brunei Medical Service even before Dato Hart (*BIMJ 2011; 7:191*) joined the service in 1962. At that time, Dato Singh family was still young. His wife was a house maker. His children grew up and received their education in schools located in Pekan Brunei.

Although a practicing psychiatrist, Dato Singh also had many administrative duties, assisting Pehin Frank (*BIMJ 2011; 7:90*), the State Medical Director in overseeing the running of the Brunei General Hospital (BGH) (*BIMJ 2012; 8:229*). Dato Singh was trained in the British administrative style and this was reflected in his strict nature. He carried out his administrative duties from a small bungalow located on the southeast corner of the hospital complex. He oversaw the construction of the Raja Isteri Pengiran Anak Saleha (RIPAS) Hospital, a 550 bedded modern hospital covering all specialties located less than a mile away from BGH. He also oversaw the transfer of the Medical Services from the BGH to the newly built RIPAS Hospital.

Apart from running the BGH, Dato Singh was also the District Medical Officer, in charge of health matters in the Brunei-Muara District, one of the four districts. At that time, most of the healthcare services were located in hospitals and basic healthcare services to the rural areas were provided by travelling dressers. Dato Singh developed the psychiatric service in Brunei. Psychiatric illnesses remain tabooed even now, however awareness and acceptance are improving. Unlike the present, treatment options were few in the earlier years. Treatments then were limited to warding patients and use of few available therapy such as electroconvulsive therapy. After the relocation to RIPAS Hospital, Dato Singh gave up clinic practice and concentrated on administrative duties.

For his dedicated service to the healthcare, he was bestowed the title of Dato in the 1970s. Colleagues who had worked with Dato Singh remember him as strict but approachable, punctual and always got the work done. He continued to work well into his seventies before retiring in 1985. He left the country to live with his children.