

The commission of Inquiry into the Health Services

by A.A. Sandosham

THE MEDICAL AND HEALTH SERVICES of the country have been undergoing rapid changes since it gained independence in 1957. The Malaysian Medical Association was concerned with the piecemeal development that was taking place and the lack of overall planning and philosophy. The Association felt the need for a Commission of Inquiry to study the future needs taking into account the financial and other resources of the country and make recommendations as to the sort of health service we should aim at achieving and phase the development programme. We did not ourselves feel competent to tackle this problem, most of our members lacking this overall knowledge of health services in other countries and the time necessary to study this complex question in detail. Nevertheless, the Council had set up a Committee composed of Dato (Dr.) Lim Kee Jin (Chairman), Dato (Dr.) Keshmahinder Singh, Professor Tan Eng Seong and Professor A.A. Sandosham, Dr. Syed Mahmood bin Syed Hussain, Dr. Chan Jee Swee and Dr. Chin Kui Sang to study

the problem as the Ministry of Health did not appear to favour the idea of bringing out a Commission of Inquiry.

We were, therefore, taken by surprise but delighted to learn of the presence in our midst of two Colombo Plan advisers to the Government of Malaysia, namely Dr. H.W. Garlick, Professor of Medicine at Monash University, and Dr. R.C. Webb, Commonwealth Director of Health for Victoria, to tackle this very problem. These two advisers, during a 3-month period early this year, travelled extensively in the country interviewing medical men and administrators gathering information at firsthand to supplement the facts and figures provided by the Ministry of Health.

The Commission, in the course of its stay in Malaysia, met members of the MMA and its Council and representatives of the Private Practitioners' Associations. Nevertheless, the MMA was requested by the Commission to submit a memorandum on its views, especially in regard to certain questions they had submitted to us. This posed a

big problem to the MMA as it was given too little time to consult members and as it would be next to impossible to express views on certain questions which would meet with the unanimous approval of all sectors of the medical profession. The aforementioned Committee of MMA was hastily summoned which, with the cooption of a few more, produced a memorandum after 4 days' deliberation. It was made clear in the memorandum that although it had the approval of the Executive Committee of MMA, the Council as a whole had not met to discuss it and that the members have not had the opportunity to see it. It was made known through the MMA Newsletter that individual members or groups could present their views directly to the Commission on any matters relating to the future of the health services of the country.

The memorandum attempts to arrive at broad areas of agreement but where there might be differing points of view, both have been presented without prejudice so that the Commission could formulate its own recommendations. A number of questions have been put to us but in addition we have expressed our views on related problems. Among the questions tackled were, (1) if there

should be a dichotomy of technical or medical administrators and non-medical administrators giving more autonomy to the states and the large hospitals, (2) measures to be taken to remedy the uneven distribution of medical manpower in the urban and rural areas, (3) should medical practitioners in private practice be given the opportunity to work part-time in Government hospitals and health centres, (4) should medical practitioners in Government service in certain rural areas be afforded a right of private practice outside normal working hours to make these areas more attractive, and (6) how to increase the production or importation of medical practitioners.

In addition to answering the questions submitted to us by the Commission, the memorandum attempts to tackle a few other topics, such as hospitals, training, research and methods of recruitment and retention of medical officers in Government service. It is hoped that the Commission found the memorandum, although hastily drawn up and not comprehensive, of some assistance in their deliberations and the MMA is looking forward to seeing, in the near future, concrete recommendations and guidelines for the future of the health services of the country.

CHANGE OF NAME OF OUR JOURNAL

THE MEDICAL JOURNAL OF MALAYA has been a quarterly publication (Sept., Dec., Mar., June) issued by the Malaya branch of the British Medical Association ever since September 1946. The Editor is elected at the Annual General Meeting each year and serves on the Council of the Association. When the Malayan Medical Association succeeded the Malaya branch of the British Medical Association, the Medical Journal of Malaya continued as the official publication of the MMA.

It was originally published by Young Advertising and Marketing Ltd. and on their recommendation in 1966, during the editorship of Professor A.A. Sandosham, the publication was undertaken

by the Straits Times Press and printed by Times Printers Ltd. on behalf of the Malayan Medical Association. Last year, the name of the Association became registered as the Malaysian Medical Association in keeping with the national character of the organisation. Accordingly, it has been decided to change the name of the Journal, with the commencement of the next new volume of the journal. Notice is hereby given that the name of our quarterly publication will be changed from "The Medical Journal of Malaya" to "The Medical Journal of Malaysia" commencing with the September, 1972 issue but the volume will continue the serial number, i.e., it will be Vol. XXVII No. 1. Sept. 1972.