

Editorial

The Institute for Medical Research – Its Diamond Jubilee

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THE OPPORTUNITY was taken on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Institute for Medical Research, Kuala Lumpur in February 1976 to underline its success story.

Dr. G.F. de Witt, the Acting Director of the Institute, at the Opening Ceremony of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations outlined its history starting with the establishment of the Pathological Institute in 1900, on the recommendation of Sir Frank Swettenham, the then Resident-General of the Federated Malay States. It was to "carry out scientific and sustained research into the causes, treatment and prevention of such scourges as beri-beri and all forms of malaria fevers". The following year, with the construction of the first buildings, the name was changed to the present one.

At the close of the last century, beri-beri was claiming its victims by the thousands and malaria caused great suffering and loss among the labourers engaged in opening up the country for cultivation. The Institute staff got down to work immediately and produced wonderful results. Since then the I.M.R. has tackled a wide variety of medical and health problems including malnutrition, small pox, rabies, drug prophylaxis, scrub typhus, leptospirosis and filariasis to mention only a few.

From the very beginning the Institute has adopted an open door policy providing every opportunity for scientific workers from abroad to undertake collaborative research. Over the years the Institute's research activities have been broadened through its association with the British Medical Research Council, the U.S. Army Medical Research Command, U.S. Public Health Research Unit, the University of California International Centre for Medical Research, SEAMEO-Tropical Medicine Project, etc.

The Institute suffered a temporary set back with the departure on Malayanisation of a large number of expatriate research staff with Independence. However, the I.M.R. managed to survive

and soon began to improve on its former record. The Institute's main functions have been to carry out research into local medical problems, provide diagnostic laboratory facilities and produce vaccines. With the appointment of Dr. Ungku Omar-Ahmad as director there was a change in policy to meet national needs resulting in the running of a three-year course for medical laboratory technologists and a one-year course for junior laboratory assistants. Greater emphasis was laid on rural health research and the training of staff for post-graduate qualifications abroad. The Institute became recognized as the National Centre for Tropical Medicine under the South East Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) and undertook a six month course leading to the Diploma in Applied Parasitology and Entomology (D.A.P. & E.). Many senior members of the I.M.R. staff have become obligated to undertake other teaching duties at the University of Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan, the Public Health Institute, the School of Nursing and at other SEAMEO-TROPMED Centres in Jakarta, Bangkok and Manila.

The late Tun Abdul Razak envisaged the future of the I.M.R. in his address to the Malaysian Society of Parasitology and Tropical Medicine in 1973. He said, "Indulging in a little crystal gazing it appears to me that the area bounded by Jalan Pahang, Jalan Raja Muda and Jalan Pekeliling will become one of the finest medical centres in South East Asia for medical research and teaching and training of medical and para-medical scientists".

The medical profession, represented by the Malaysian Medical Association, has the keenest interest in the future of the Institute for Medical Research. If research is given its rightful place in its development plan and the staff is not allowed to be swamped by the urgent needs of the country to provide training for technicians and others, diagnostic routine, vaccine production, etc. then all augurs well for the future of I.M.R. and the M.M.A. wishes it every success.