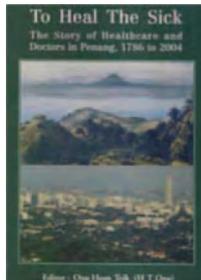


TO HEAL THE SICK: THE STORY OF HEALTHCARE AND DOCTORS IN PENANG 1786–2004



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Penang is recognised as a centre of excellence for medical and healthcare service. It is fascinating to know how Penang has achieved this status over the past few decades.

To Heal the Sick: The Story of Healthcare and Doctors in Penang 1786-2004 relates the struggle of the people and medical practitioners in Penang to provide basic health service from the late 18th century. Their plight and fight against infectious diseases, namely cholera, smallpox, malaria and plaque, was intriguing. Interesting historical facts were presented in a light, witty manner with a good sense of humour. This book is replete with rare pictures of personalities that shaped the medical history of Penang, as well as many places of cultural and historical importance in Penang.

Through contribution of memoirs from various medical practitioners, there is a remarkably comprehensive account of the cultural, social, environmental and political issues that help to mould the healthcare system of Penang. Their personal experiences provide us with valuable insight into the Western influence on the lifestyle of the people of Penang during the British colonial time, devastating impacts of Japanese occupation and threats of communism, opium war, political persecutions of medical practitioners, and the courageous and selfless contributions of the medical heroes of Penang.

Along the way it traces the roots of the private and public healthcare infrastructures in Penang through the description of the working life of doctors in the public and private sector. These doctors' reflections on the change in professional attitudes, expectations and demands of the public provide us with awareness to strive for medical excellence and to maintain the high respect and status bestowed to the medical profession. However, in spite of the obvious advancement in the healthcare system today, we are still in pursuit of the ideals promoted by Dr Wu Lien Ti in his publication, "Prospects of Social Medicine in Malaysia" more than 50 years ago.

Valuable information is provided on the early establishment and achievements of Penang Medical Practitioners' Society and Malaysian Medical Association for the past decades. These organisations nurture cooperation and unity between hospital-based doctors and private general practitioners, and channelled the doctors' grievances to the government.

It is useful to understand how the healthcare contribution of private hospitals started off in the form of missionary and charitable organisations. Presently they provide private healthcare service not only to Malaysians but also to foreigners from neighbouring countries, a term we now called "health tourism", something unheard of 40 years ago.

My only contention is the focus on the detailed description of the development of each subspecialty using medical jargons which lay people may not understand. However this section of the book gives valuable insight into the advancement of medical practice and technology, and a glimpse of the challenging experience of the government doctors who tried to serve the poor and the needy in whatever ways possible at that time.

On a personal basis, I have enjoyed reading this book tremendously. It is remarkably well written with a good sense of humour and is suitable for easy reading. It takes me down memory lane with familiar names of people in Penang, some of them were personal friends. Memoirs of my fellow colleagues reminds me of my childhood experience as a patient to the private general practitioner, my working experience in Penang General Hospital, community clinics and private hospital, and the problems I encountered as a solo general practitioner in a poor community in Penang. This book has instilled in me a sense of pride, gratitude and satisfaction to be one of the medical practitioners of Penang.

To Heal the Sick is recommended for all. It is a source for sharing opinions and experiences; it promotes harmony and unity among medical practitioners of Penang. Congratulations to the Editor Dr Ong Hean Teik for his initiative and creative ideas to make this book a success and to all the contributing authors for their fun-filled, warm hearted and well written memoirs.

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