

# Youngberg Memorial Adventist Hospital

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## ERIC TEO CHOON CHEW

Eric Teo Choon Chew, graduate of Loma Linda University School of Public Health, is currently the health director of the Seventh-day Adventist Conference of Singapore and, since 2010, has been the director of Youngberg Wellness Centre.

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Youngberg Memorial Adventist Hospital, a medical institution situated in Singapore, was named in memory of Gustavus B. Youngberg, a missionary to North Borneo. It was opened in 1948. Inpatient operations ceased in 1995. Youngberg Adventist Hospital then downscaled its operations to its outpatient program, the Youngberg Wellness Centre. Today, the Youngberg Wellness Centre is part of the network of Seventh-day Adventist wellness centers around the world.

## Developments

Seventh-day Adventist medical missionary work began in Singapore in July 1905 shortly after the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Davey, who opened a treatment room in G. F. Jones's house at Sophia Road. The treatment room proved to be popular with the public; by the end of the first month of its opening, 56 treatments were given, not counting those visits made to treat patients in their own homes.<sup>1</sup>

One possible contributing factor to the popularity of the treatment room was the novelty of the methods used in the treatment. Mr. Davey was a hydropathic physician and masseur, and he used no drugs in his treatment of the sick. Rather, he used massage, hot and cold water both internally and externally, vapor and Turkish baths, as well as strict attention to diet.<sup>2</sup> An Indian doctor whom G. F. Jones had gotten acquainted with earlier was so enthusiastic about SDA medical work that he helped provide patients for the treatment room.<sup>3</sup>

The medical work was conducted to heal the sick and as a means of sharing the SDA faith in terms of its health principles and religious beliefs. In a report in the Union Conference Record, the Daveys indicated their desire to conduct cooking classes as there were a number of people interested in SDA eating habits, the food they ate, and the way they prepared their food. A health-food store operated alongside the treatment room, and, through this venue, healthy food was made available to the public.<sup>4</sup> The work done by Mr. and Mrs. Davey appeared in the "Singapore Straits Times" of September 1, 1905. Then, a few days later, the "Eastern Daily Mail" of September 7, 1905, featured a lengthy description of the work of Seventh-day Adventists in Singapore.<sup>5</sup>

Besides sharing their way of life, the SDA medical missionaries were also keen to share their religious beliefs. As such, patients were encouraged to receive Bible studies. One example was the wife of the Indian doctor mentioned earlier, who, while being treated by Mrs. Davey, was having Bible studies with Mrs. Jones.<sup>6</sup> Another

example was Lee Chong Miow, who, in the course of receiving medical treatment, was led to studying the Bible with the Joneses and was converted. His conversion was a valuable contribution to the SDA work as he became a very active worker for the church. He worked as a literature evangelist, bringing SDA books to various places such as Thailand, Sumatra, and Java, and he was a preacher in the Penang Road Church in Singapore. He also contributed financially to various projects, one of which was the establishment of the mission clinic in 1942.<sup>7</sup>

On November 11, 1942, the clinic located in a warehouse at North Quay was officially opened under the name of Mission Clinic.<sup>8</sup> The clinic was later relocated at the unused premises of the Malayan Sign Press, and work was resumed on December 26, 1942, with Mrs. Eunice Wong, nurse; Mr. Stephen Tan, dispenser; Madam Mary Loh, janitor; and Mr. M. Lucas, dresser-in-charge. Within the first two months, an average of 30 patients a day was treated. It was not surprising that many were coming to the clinic as about 70% of the work done in the Mission Clinic was charity; free treatment was given to those who could not pay.<sup>9</sup>

## Founding

The beneficial work carried out by the Mission Clinic inspired the idea of starting a hospital in Singapore. Dr. George G. Innocent responded to the call to establish the hospital work and arrived in Singapore with his family on December 23, 1947. The beginning of this medical evangelistic institution was made possible by the 13<sup>th</sup> Sabbath Offering surplus collected during December 1946.<sup>10</sup> A building on 1.8 acres of land at Upper Serangoon was purchased for the purpose of the work, and, while renovations were carried out, the Mission Clinic continued its work. In March 1948, the hospital was given the official name of Youngberg Memorial Hospital in memory of Gustavus B. Youngberg, an SDA missionary who died in an internment camp at Kuching, Sarawak, during the Japanese occupation.<sup>11</sup>

The clinic section of the hospital opened its doors to the public in May 1948, and, in September, the inpatient department with its 20 beds started functioning. The first hospital staff consisted of Dr. G. G. Innocent as medical director and treasurer, Miss Wilma Leazer as superintendent of nurses, Mrs. Innocent as receptionist, Mr. M. Lucas as laboratory and X-ray technician, Mr. J. P. Rao as pharmacist, Mr. Goh Boon Chay as accountant and cashier, and a staff of nine nurses.

Work in this hospital was progressing, and by 1950, it was decided to expand the hospital by building a new wing.<sup>12</sup> On April 24, 1952, the new wing was officially opened by Colonel Blythe, the colonial secretary, with the words, "To the glory of God and for the service of man, I declare this wing open." As a result of the addition of the new wing, inpatient intake during 1952 and 1953 more than doubled.<sup>13</sup>

SDA medical ministry began as early as 1905, but it was firmly established in Singapore only in 1948 with the opening of Youngberg Memorial Hospital. Through the channel of medical work, the hospital hoped not only to relieve suffering but, more importantly, to encourage their patients to be more interested in their spiritual

health, pointing them to the divine healer, Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup>

## History

In 1968, Youngberg Memorial Hospital celebrated 20 years of service. From the original 20-bed capacity and a staff of 16 workers in 1948, God blessed their efforts, and they grew into a 75-bed hospital employing 114 workers.<sup>15</sup>

The hospital promoted its prenatal care programs offered by obstetrician gynecologists, midwives, the health education department, and missionary wives as volunteers from the Far Eastern Division. As a result of this effort, many expectant mothers were better prepared to cope with the delivery of their babies and appreciative of the classes they attended.<sup>16</sup>

A living donor kidney transplant was successfully performed at Youngberg Memorial Adventist Hospital on December 11, 1978, by two teams of consulting surgeons, anesthetists, and assisting nurses. It was the first such transplant to be carried out in a private hospital in Singapore.<sup>17</sup>

Youngberg Adventist Hospital underwent renovations in 1989. According to Hospital President Joshua Goh, renovations involved the exterior and interior of all buildings so that Youngberg Adventist Hospital could provide better health care services to the community. Medical equipment was upgraded, and staff were provided additional training to ensure improved patient care.<sup>18</sup>

## Historical Role

Youngberg Memorial Adventist Hospital operated as a non-profit organization in that none of its accrued earnings would benefit any individual. Instead, any profits made were used to improve or maintain the hospital's facilities or aid other missionary projects.<sup>19</sup>

A Five-Day Plan to Quit Smoking was held in 1979 at Youngberg Memorial Adventist Hospital. Of the 24 who attended, 22 quit smoking. The success of the Five-Day Plan to Quit Smoking resulted in a lengthy article with pictures in the "Straits Times" and the production of a TV program. Many people in Singapore knew of Youngberg Memorial Adventist Hospital because of its health education program for the public.<sup>20</sup>

Youngberg Memorial Adventist Hospital had been a great blessing to the church in Singapore. It gave the church an identity to be rightly proud of and truly exemplified the principles and practice of Christian love and service by which the church is known throughout the world. From its inception, the hospital was guided by committed men and women who brought honor to the institution and the church.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, patronage of the hospital from both church members and the general public declined from 1975-1995. It also coincided with the rise of newer, better-equipped private hospitals and the permanent return of

long-term missionary personnel to their homelands. In 1978, a recommendation was made that the institution be closed. Despite several changes in leadership from 1978-1987 to manage the hospital's financial situation, losses continued.<sup>22</sup>

In 1987, the board voted to have a part of the property developed to pay off large debts to the union and to provide necessary capital for continued operations and for renovations of the hospital's structure. The now-40-bed hospital was no longer financially viable in the Singapore market.<sup>23</sup>

In October 1993, the hospital board approved development plans to increase bed capacity to over 200 and, in so doing, provide the economy of scale that could make the hospital financially viable. It was anticipated that, when government approval was received, the losses would be offset by monies advanced to the hospital by the developer. These financial projections were based on the assumption that the development plans, once submitted, would be approved by the government by the end of 1993. Unfortunately, the approval was delayed several times to an indefinite period into the first half of 1995. These delays threw out all financial projections and precipitated an operating crisis. With liabilities of over \$1 million USD and cash in hand of about \$50,000 USD, the institution was technically bankrupt. The impact of such losses, if allowed to continue, could have had serious negative consequences on the functioning of the union.

On January 16, 1995, the union executive committee met and voted with much sadness and regret to cease inpatient operations effective March 1, 1995.<sup>24</sup> Youngberg Adventist Hospital then downscaled its operations to its outpatient program, the Youngberg Wellness Centre.<sup>25</sup> Youngberg Wellness Centre<sup>26</sup> was subsumed into Southeast Asia Union Mission. It soon became an active partner with the Ministry of Health and various government agencies in Singapore and specializes in corporate wellness programs and other public health initiatives.

## Outlook

The Gospel was spread and shared to those who came through the doors of Youngberg Memorial Hospital. The church broke all previous records with 18 baptisms in 1959 – a 300% increase over the previous year. Subsequently, the church grew to a membership of 1001 in 1967, the second largest in Southeast Asia Union's history.<sup>27</sup>

It was in the 1980s that Youngberg Wellness Centre was set up as the health education department of Youngberg Memorial Adventist Hospital. The Centre has pioneered a number of notable community health programs such as the lifestyle change program NEWSTART, the Five-Day Plan to Quit Smoking, and its popular vegetarian cuisine cooking classes.<sup>28</sup>

Today, Youngberg Wellness Centre is part of the SDA Singapore Conference and continues to be part of the strong network of the 150 Adventist hospitals and wellness centers around the world such as the world-

renowned Loma Linda University Medical Center in the United States. Youngberg Wellness Centre aims to carry on its rich and strong legacy of bringing healing and health to the community.<sup>29</sup>

Youngberg Wellness Centre currently focus on providing health-promoting programs to companies or organizations across Singapore. Its services are recognized by the Health Promotion Board of Singapore, which specializes in assisting corporate organizations plan and implement comprehensive year-long health promotion and intervention programs using the Workplace Health Promotion grant.<sup>30</sup>

## List of Names Changes

Youngberg Memorial Hospital (1948-1972)

Youngberg Memorial Adventist Hospital (1973-1981)

Singapore Adventist Hospital (1982-1983)

Youngberg Memorial Adventist Hospital (1984)

Youngberg Adventist Hospital (1985-1995)

## List of Leaders/Administrators<sup>31</sup>

Medical Superintendent: George G. Innocent (1948-1950).

Medical Directors: George G. Innocent (1951-1953); G. H. Coffin (1954-1956); G. H. A. McLaren (1957-1958); G. H. Coffin (1960-1966); C. A. Olson (1968); Paul Genstler (1969-1974).

Administrators: A. L. Jacobson (1975-1977); E. J. Heisler (1978-1979); J. A. Hay (1980-1981).

Presidents: Donald L. Schatzschneider (1983-1984); Kenneth D. Reimche (1986-1989); Joshua Goh (1990-1995).

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12. Mrs. Innocent, "Youngberg Memorial Hospital," *Outlook*, August 1949.
13. *Medical Ministry*, Chapter 3.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *The Messenger*, May-June 1968.
16. *The Messenger*, January-February 1979.
17. *Ibid.*
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19. Goh Boon Chay, interview by author, September 28, 1983.
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