

Brief History of Kandang Kerbau Hospital

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Kandang Kerbau Hospital, the birthplace of over 1.2 million Singaporeans, was the largest maternity hospital in the world from the 1950s to the early 1970s. It was named after the district where it was located. The district around the crossroads formed by Serangoon Road, Selegie Road, Bukit Timah Road and Rochor Road was known in Malay as “Kandang Kerbau” (“Buffalo Enclosure”, because in the old days, there was a buffalo pen in the locality). In Teochew and Hokkien, it was known as “Tek Kah” and in Mandarin as “Zhu Jiao” (“below the clumps of bamboo”, because in the early days, clumps of bamboo grew on the hillocks in the district). The hospital, commonly known as “KK” or “Tek Kah” served as the national maternity hospital of Singapore from 1924 to 1997.

On 1 October 1924, led by Professor J S English, the first Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (O&G), KK Hospital was converted into a free maternity hospital with 30 beds. On that momentous first day, five babies were born – three Malays, one Chinese and one Japanese. A new block containing 120 beds was completed by 1934. In that year, there were 2,575 births, a figure which continued to climb steadily over the years. Another new block was erected and opened in July 1940 bringing the total number of beds to 180. In that year 6,184 births were recorded.

During the period of Japanese hostilities in 1940-41, the Hospital became an Emergency General Hospital providing 500 beds. After the fall of Singapore and during the Japanese Occupation (1942-45), the hospital served as the Civil General Hospital and was known as *Chuo Byoin* (Central Hospital). Dr B H Sheares, who became Malaya's first local Professor in O&G in 1951 and the Republic of Singapore's Second President in 1971, was its Deputy Medical Superintendent then. After the war, KK Hospital remained the Civil General Hospital until 1 July 1946, when it resumed as the only O&G hospital serving the country.

The post-war years witnessed high birth rates at KK Hospital. The record number of births or ‘birthquakes’

earned KK Hospital consecutive entries in the Guinness Book of Records from the 1950s to the 1970s as the world's largest maternity hospital. The 1975 edition of the Guinness Book of Records revealed ‘*The largest maternity hospital in the world is the Kandang Kerbau Government Maternity Hospital in Singapore. It has 239 midwives, 151 beds for gynaecological cases, 388 maternity beds and an output of 31,255 babies in 1969 compared with the record “birthquake” of 39,856 babies (more than 109 per day) in 1966.*’

KK Hospital also witnessed remarkable improvement in maternal and perinatal mortality rates, quite unmatched in the history of obstetrics of the world. The maternal mortality rate dropped dramatically from 760 per 100,000 births in 1930 to 7 per 100,000 births in 1987 and the perinatal mortality rate decreased from above 50 per 1000 births in 1940s to less than 5 per 1000 births in 1990s, achieving world class standards. KK Hospital was the centre of Singapore's pioneering feeder system of Maternal and Child Health Clinics (MCHC) with 66 MCHCs in 1964. It was also the centre of O&G and reproductive medicine research in South-East Asia and was world famous for research on trophoblastic disease (molar pregnancy) and prostaglandins (used for induction of labour). It was the birthplace of Asia's first IVF baby in 1983 and was Singapore's most important teaching and training centre for midwives and obstetricians & gynaecologists from 1924 to 1997.

On 1 April 1990, the KK Hospital ended its 132-year history as a government hospital and embarked on a new chapter in its history as a restructured hospital. O&G units at Alexandra Hospital and Toa Payoh Hospital were closed and transferred to KK Hospital. In 1997, KK Hospital moved to its new premises nearby at 100 Bukit Timah Road with 888 beds and was renamed KK Women's and Children's Hospital. Besides O&G, the new hospital assumed an additional role as the first Children's Hospital in Singapore, bringing together the pediatric services of the Singapore General Hospital, Tan Tock Seng Hospital and Alexandra Hospital. KK Women's Hospital opened its doors on 10 March 1997; while KK Children's Hospital admitted its first patient on 9 May 1997.