



The Mission Hospital in Kashmir - 1912

The History of Healthcare in Kashmir

The History of Modern Healthcare in Kashmir

The advent of modern health care in pre-independence Kashmir is synonymous with Christian missionary activities.

We are indebted to Walter R. Lawrence, the famous Settlement Commissioner for detailing the traditional treatment methods before the advent of the missionaries. The following is an excerpt from his 'The Valley of Kashmir' published in 1895:

"Even now the mass of the people believe in their own doctors, many of whom are men of considerable ability and experience. There are 300 Hakims or doctors in Kashmir, and as a rule the profession is hereditary. Their system is based on the Greek system of medicine, and I have known cases in which some of my subordinates have derived great benefit from the skill of the Kashmiri Hakim. The Hakims have a considerable knowledge of herbs, and their herb-collectors are the shepherds, who spend the summer on the high mountains where the most valued plants are found. The Hakim charges a wealthy patient eight annas a visit, but he makes some money by compounding medicines.

The Hakim does not dabble in surgery. He will mark with a pen the vein which is to be opened, but a barber must be called in to operate. There are over 1,900 barbers in the valley. If leeches are to be applied a special man is sent for.

Such samples as the Hakim does not obtain from the shepherds are bought from the druggists, of whom there are 159 in Kashmir. The Hakim never attends midwifery cases; special women, of whom there are seventy-four, dispose of these cases.

Besides the professional Hakims, there are many ' wise women ' in the villages who have considerable knowledge of the properties of herbs, and it is a remarkable fact that nearly every peasant seems to know something about the medicinal powers of plants. The sovereign remedy of the Hakims for all very serious cases is the chob-i-chin (Smilax China), a kind of root brought from China and administered internally.

The people believe greatly in the efficacy of amulets given by Pirs. They cure all diseases. The amulet is either fastened on the right arm, neck or turban, or is put in water and the water and ink of the writing drunk by the patient, or is burnt and the smoke inhaled by the sick man. This inhalation brings dreams, and the dreams must be told to the Pir, who at once knows what is to be done. The chief principle in the treatment of the Pir fraternity is that illness is caused by evil spirits, and that a talisman suitably prepared, with the name of the patient's mother on it, will drive out any devil. "

It was this scenario that existed before western treatment concepts were introduced in Kashmir by the medical missionaries.

The Pre-Independence Era

The history of modern health care in the pre-independence era in Kashmir is synonymous with Christian missionary activities. While their motives were admittedly of a missionary nature, yet the pioneering role of the Kashmir Medical Mission cannot be denied.

The Kashmir Medical Mission

The founder of the Kashmir Medical Mission was the **Rev. Robert Clark**. His wife, a qualified medical specialist, has the distinction of introducing the western concept of medicine in the valley. On his return from a missionary tour in Kashmir, Ladakh and Skardu, Mr Clark received support from a group of leading civilians and British officers, including Sir Robert Montgomery, then Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab. A fund of fourteen thousand rupees was raised to set up a Medical Mission in Kashmir. The Lieutenant-Governor sent an invitation to the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and made a personal donation of a thousand rupees to the proposed Kashmir Medical Mission. Dr **William J. Elmslie**, the first medical missionary appointed by the CMS, arrived in Kashmir in 1865. He was the son of an Aberdeen cobbler and had obtained M. A. from Aberdeen University and M.D. from Edinburgh University.

During the summer of 1865, Dr. Elmslie treated about 2000 patients. At that time no European was allowed to remain in the valley in the winter. On his return in 1866 Dr. Elmslie was unable to obtain adequate accommodation due to strong state opposition to the missionary component of the CMS medical activities. However, displaying a true Scottish never-say-die spirit he successfully treated 3365 patients in a single tent serving both as OPD and IPD. Dr. Elmslie revisited the valley of Kashmir each summer till 1869 and treated thousands of patients including the victims of a widespread cholera epidemic in 1867.

In 1870 the **Rev. W. T. Storrs** manned the Kashmir Medical Mission. In 1872 Dr. Elmslie returned to find Srinagar in the throes of another severe cholera epidemic. His own health was affected and he died on the return journey in the autumn of 1872.

Dr. Elmslie's successor, **Dr. Theodore Maxwell**, was politically well-connected and was able to resume the activities of the Medical Mission in 1874 under favourable conditions. Official opposition was withdrawn and Maharaja Pratap Singh granted a site for a hospital at Drugjan on the Rustam Garhi hill. A small building was constructed at State expense where Dr. Maxwell worked for two years till his own health broke down and he was compelled to leave India.



The Mission Hospital at Drugjan

Dr. Maxwell was succeeded by an Indian Christian doctor, **John Williams**, and then by **Dr. Edmund Downes** in 1877. Dr. Downes, who had resigned from the Royal Artillery for medical missionary work, worked tirelessly for six years till he in turn was forced by ill-health to retire in 1882. By personal contributions and donations from friends in England, Dr. Downes erected the **Mission Hospital** with facilities for more than a hundred in-patients. He also obtained permission to stay in Kashmir in winter.



Boat for transferring patients

From 1877-1879 Kashmir was afflicted by a severe famine.

Dr. Arthur Neve arrived in Kashmir in March 1882 followed in 1883 by the **Rev. J. H. Knowles**. In 1886 Dr. Arthur Neve was joined by his brother, **Dr. Ernest F. Neve** in Kashmir. Later their sister, **Ms Nora Neve**, became Superintendent of Nurses at the Mission Hospital.



Patients at the Mission Hospital

In the year 1899, 35,000 visits had been registered at the hospital, besides patients seen in the villages while trekking through the countryside. Nineteen years after his arrival, the Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal was conferred on Dr. Arthur Neve for Public Service. During this period a number of catastrophes, both natural and man-made, hit Kashmir. In 1885 a great earthquake occurred and five serious cholera epidemics with at least forty thousand deaths each year occurred in 1888, 1892, 1900, 1907 and 1910.

At that time practically the whole population of Kashmir contracted smallpox in childhood. It was described by Dr. Neve as the most frequent cause of total incurable blindness. He wrote that from smallpox and other causes, fifty per cent of children in Kashmir were said to die in infancy.

An epidemic of plague with over 95 per cent mortality was reported in 1903. The disease gradually died out, after lingering in some isolated villages near Wular Lake.

Church of England Zenana Missionary Society (CEZMS)

CEZMS efforts were started in Kashmir in 1886 by **Mrs. Rallia Ram** as an honorary worker of the society. **Dr. Fanny Butler** was the first student enrolled at the London School of Medicine for Women and in 1880, the first woman medical missionary sent to India. She had been inspired to travel to India as a medical missionary by an appeal for medical women issued by Dr. Elmslie just before his death.

In May 1888, Dr. Butler reached Srinagar at Dr. Neve's request. The CEZMS rented a dispensary in the city and named it the "**Zenana Shifa Khana**". Five patients were treated on August 5th, 1888, the opening day. By the end of the year five thousand patients had been treated with thirty-five in-patients admitted in a makeshift hospital in the adjoining house. Impressed by the CEZMS activities, **Mrs. Isabella Bishop** donated 500 pounds to build a new thirty-bedded women's hospital as a memorial to her husband. In June 1890 the **John Bishop Memorial Hospital** was opened by the Bishop of Lahore at the Mandir Bagh. Next year the flooded Jehlum damaged the hospital and its work had to be transferred to temporary premises near the Dal Gate.

Kashmir Medical Mission, 1893 (average of past five years)
Mission Hospital Srinagar (Eighty beds),
8,688 out-patients
853 in-patients
2,086 minor surgical operations
503 major surgeries
Temporary winter branch, (two months) 1,469 new patients in a total of 2,022
Villages (90 days total) 5,167



Dr. Noel Fletcher examining patients at John Bishop Memorial Hospital at Anantnag

In 1892 a second flood wrecked the John Bishop Memorial Hospital completely and it was rebuilt in the town of Anantnag on land donated by the Maharaja at the request of Lord Frederick Roberts, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army. The first in-patient was admitted in June 1902. The doctor in charge was **Ms Minnie Gomery**, M.D and her Nursing Sister colleague was **Ms Kate Nownham**.

The **Church of England Zenana Missionary Society Hospital** was established at Rainawari in 1908. **Elizabeth Mary Newman** was bestowed the title of the 'Florence Nightingale of Kashmir' by Tyndale-Biscoe for her work at this hospital. The CEZMS Hospital underwent extensive upgradation in 1936.

Other Hospitals

In 1891, a separate **State Leper Hospital** was established by the State under the management of the Church Missionary Society. About twelve acres of land on a peninsula projecting into the Nagin Lake and £300 for a thirty-bed hospital and one year's maintenance were granted by the Maharajah. By 1911 the number of patients had reached one hundred.

In 1891 the Maharajah of Kashmir also donated land and a sum of Rs. 1500 for setting up a **Visitors Cottage Hospital** exclusively for white people at the foot hills of the Shankaracharya Hill.



Visitors Cottage Hospital

State Medical Service

Possibly as an indirect result of the work of the Kashmir Medical Mission, the first **Kashmir State Dispensary** was started in the late 1860's. This was to be the forerunner of the **State Medical Service**. In 1895, Walter Lawrence reported that the State maintained "one excellent hospital in Srinagar and six dispensaries, three of which are situated in the districts".

The **State Hospital**, situated at Hazuri Bagh, was managed by Rai Bahadur Dr. A. Mitra as its first Chief Medical Officer. He later served as Public Works Minister on the Maharajah's State Council. It was initially known as the **Maharaja's Hospital** and later as the **Sadar** or **State Hospital**. British Residency Surgeons acted as Superintending Surgeons to this Hospital.

Of the diseases treated in the State Hospital and the dispensaries, the following were the most common: fevers, syphilitic diseases, rheumatic affections, nervous system diseases, eye diseases, respiratory diseases, dyspepsia, diseases of the digestive system, connective tissue and skin diseases. Venereal diseases formed 25 per cent of the surgical cases.

Walter Lawrence reported in the late nineteenth century that excellent surgical instruments were being manufactured in Kashmir, and many instruments in use in the State Hospital were locally manufactured.

In 1891-92, the State Medical Services treated 122,960 out-patients and 615 in-patients 2,188 surgical operations were performed, of which 283 were major surgeries.

In 1892-93, 146 mental health patients were treated at an asylum connected with the Srinagar Jail.

The **Diamond Jubilee Zenana Hospital** at Nawakadal was built in 1897 to celebrate 60 years of Queen Victoria's reign. Obstetrics & Gynecology Services were shifted here from the State Hospital. At present the Govt Girls College for Women Nawakadal Srinagar stands at the riverside location of the erstwhile Diamond Jubilee Zenana Hospital.

An X-ray plant was installed in the State Hospital in 1913-14 and a dental wing was opened in January 1930.

In 1929 a **Sanatorium** for patients suffering from Tuberculosis was set up in Tangmarg.

The **St. Joseph's Mission Hospital** was established in the mid 1930s in Baramulla by the Mill Hill Missionaries.

In 1940 several important schemes to provide better health care facilities were introduced in Kashmir, including the construction of a major hospital comparable with the best medical institutions.

The estate of Hadow Mills Carpet Factory was acquired for the purpose, and the foundation stone of the **State Hospital (SMHS)** was laid by the Marquis of Linlithgow, the then Viceroy of India on October 15, 1940. The hospital was inaugurated by his successor, Lord Wavell on 11th of October 1945.

Several Missionary societies were active in Kashmir in the early 20th century including the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.



Franciscan Missionaries of Mary treating patients at Baramulla in 1921



The foundation stone of CE Zenana Missionary Society Hospital at Rainawari was laid by C.E. TYNDALE BISCOE on 17th October 1908.

The Post Independence Era

In 1947 the State Medical Services comprised 2 hospitals and 87 dispensaries.

All peripheral health institutions were taken over by the Directorate of Health Services Kashmir in the post-independence era. By 1964, there were 32 hospitals and 429 dispensaries.

Prior to the 1960s, the State was granting loans every year to 40-50 medical students to study at medical colleges in other states of India.



The first medical college in J&K was founded in 1959 by **Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed**, then Prime Minister of J&K. The college started functioning at Hazuri Bagh on the banks of Jhelum river at the site of the present Lal Ded Hospital.



The first batch of GMC Srinagar

The **Government Medical College Srinagar** was formally inaugurated at its present day location in Karan Nagar adjacent to the S.M.H.S Hospital on 25th August 1961 .

Currently the **Medical Education Department** runs the **Government Medical College Srinagar** and its **Associated Hospitals**.

The Associated Hospitals are the S.M.H.S Hospital, Lal Ded Hospital, Bone& Joint Hospital, G.B Pant Hospital, Chest Diseases Hospital, Institute of Mental Health & Neurosciences (Psychiatry Diseases Hospital), Superspeciality Hospital and the Kashmir Nursing Home.



Government Medical College Srinagar

The **State** or **SMHS Hospital** in Karan Nagar became the flagship Associated Hospital of the Government Medical College Srinagar.

The **Mission Hospital** in Drugjan was converted into the present day **Government Chest Diseases Hospital**.

The former **State Hospital** building at Hazuri Bagh was converted into a 100 Bed specialized Obstetrics & Gynaecology hospital named the **Lal Ded Hospital**. It has been the main maternity hospital of Kashmir since the Obstetrics & Gynaecology services in SHMS Hospital were shut down in the 1970's.

A **Government Hospital for Children** was set up adjacent to the Lal Ded Hospital. It was shifted in to its present location at G.B Pant Hospital in Sonwar, incorporating the erstwhile Cantonment Hospital.

Government Psychiatric Diseases Hospital was started at the site of the old asylum situated at Central Jail. It is under upgradation as the **Institute of Mental Health & Neurosciences**.

In the 1980s Orthopaedic services were shifted from the SMHS Hospital to the new **Bone & Joint Hospital** in Barzulla and the **Government Dental College** in Srinagar was started in 1980.

A State-of-the-art multi-disciplinary **Superspeciality Hospital** is being set up adjacent to S.M.H.S Hospital at Shireen Bagh.



The Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences

The **Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS)** was set up in 1982 by Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, then Chief Minister of J&K, as a tertiary health care institute focused on research, post - graduate medical education and advanced patient care.

The state government took over the private **Jehlum Valley College of Medical Sciences (JVMC)** in 1998 as the under-graduate medical college of SKIMS. It is now known as the **SKIMS Medical College**.

The **Directorate of Health Services** manages 12 District Hospitals, 43 Sub-District Hospitals, 345 Primary Health Centres, and 1249 sub-centres in rural districts of Kashmir.

In Srinagar City, the Directorate runs the Jawahar Lal Nehru Memorial Hospital (JLNM), the Government Leprosy Hospital and the Gousia Hospital.



Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Hospital

The erstwhile missionary **CEZMS Hospital** at Rainawari has evolved into the **Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Hospital** under the management of the Directorate of Health Services. This multi-speciality institution is the flagship hospital of the Directorate.



Government Leprosy Hospital