

The Medical Journal of Malaysia: Its History and Its Mission

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The Medical Journal of Malaysia (MJM) is an old journal, and it is really hard to tell how old it is. It could be 66 years old or on the other hand it could be 121 years old, or somewhere in between, depending on how we do the reckoning. We are publishing volume 66 in 2011. Tracing backwards, volume 1 was published in 1946. However, that was when the journal resumed publication after the Second World War (Table I).

It had been published as the Journal of the Malaya Branch of the British Medical Association from 1937 till 1941 before it was disrupted by the Japanese Occupation. But even then, it was just a change of name. From 1937 back to 1926 it was published consecutively without break as the Malayan Medical Journal. Even today people sometimes confuse the MJM thinking it is the Malaysian Medical Journal. Perhaps that might have been a better choice for a name as it rings a bell like the British Medical Journal (BMJ) and the Singapore Medical Journal (SMJ). But the MJM it is, and has been for 66 years.

Yet 1926 is still not the beginning of the story. From 1890 till 1893 there was the Journal of the Straits Medical Association which we can claim in our ancestry. There was then a gap of 8 years after 1893 and then the journal appeared again as the Journal of the Malaya Branch of the British Medical Association in 1904, the name that was revived in 1937. This resurrection did not last long. It ceased in 1907. But not long afterwards the journal returned in 1911 as the Malayan Medical Journal. This revival lasted two years following which there was another break for 13 years. Finally, the revival in 1926 lasted till the Second World War.

With such a complicating history, it is little wonder we do not really know how old we are. There were less than 100 graduate medical practitioners in 1890 when the Straits Medical Journal was first published. That they published a journal demonstrates the importance the medical profession has placed on disseminating scientific information. It sets us apart from practitioners of folk medicine. It is not by anecdotal information or superstition that we base our practice. Today, we talk about evidence based medicine, and that has been the basis of the profession from the first.

The fact that there were so many breaks in publication in our history shows that it is not easy sustaining a medical journal. It is always more financially rewarding to treat patients than to teach doctors and medical students. Much of scientific writing is done on a voluntary basis. Even till today, medical writing is a 'specialty' that does directly not pay. Nevertheless, because its value is recognised, academic institutions have

come up with a system to reward scientific output today, even if it is an imperfect one. From its beginning, the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has sponsored the MJM, providing financially for its review process, secretarial work and lately, its open access on the internet for free. The work or reviewing and editing is done on a voluntary basis by the medical fraternity.

The argument that the MJM can claim a 121 history is based upon the MMA's claim of heritage of the forerunning medical associations such as the Straits Medical Association and the Malayan Branch of the British Medical Association. This rests on the fact that it is the medical association open to all medical practitioners registered with the Malaysian Medical Council. In the past even though the Malayan Branch of the British Medical Association was dominated by expatriates, it was the open to all doctors. The MMA today aims to be the voice for all doctors and the MJM is the scientific part of that voice.

Another thread that continues, it is the mission of the journal. From those early days of medicine in Malaysia, doctors practising here have sought to write about the diseases and the practice of medicine as they found it here. They journaled what they observed and learned, because they encountered diseases and problems in Malaysia that most of the doctors who had their training in the United Kingdom had not encountered before. It was in these journals that findings about malaria and beri-beri were presented. It was here that discoveries about melioidosis and the treatment of yaws and leprosy were recorded.

It remains the mission of the MJM to journal and archive observations about the occurrence of diseases in Malaysia and its changing patterns. I have personally found the output of the MJM in this field in the past very interesting. I abstracted bits about all the diseases that have been recorded and condensed them in a book entitled 'A Review of Diseases in Malaysia' in 1993. However, after publishing the first edition, I found the work could do with some revision and I published a second edition of the book in 2001, which nicely gives us a backward look at diseases as they occurred in Malaysia in the twentieth century. Today, the journal moves on, recording case reports and retrospective reviews of practice in Malaysia. However, the Medical Journal of Malaysia is also a forum for Malaysian doctors to present original work they do in research. Research is now an extremely wide field. Besides laboratory work and clinical research, there are research on how medical services function and how patients understand and accept medical care. There is research in medical

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education and cost effectiveness of everything. Eventually different journals need to manage the different niches in Malaysia, and each journal find its mission.

THE MISSION OF THE MJM

Amidst the flood of medical journals in the world the MJM sees its unique role in being Malaysian. We can keep abreast with the latest developments in science and technology in many leading international journals, but none of these will inform us about the realities of the situation here in Malaysia. We face a unique set of circumstances. Our geography, population structure and environment are special. The facilities we have and organisation we practice in, the belief and choices of our patients, the expectation and demands of the people are not exactly like that elsewhere. It is a niche unique for the Medical Journal of Malaysia – that is, to be Malaysian.

The MJM seeks to journal the progress of medical science and health as it develops in Malaysia and be an instrument in promoting good and excellence. The MJM will publish the facts with honesty and integrity, through a rigorous peer review process. The MJM will encourage local medical research workers with constructive criticisms in the editorial process.

We do not seek to rival others and be the best in the region. Because we recognise a unique role in being Malaysian, as such the impact factor value will not be a major concern for the MJM. To fulfill our role we set out a mission statement.

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE MJM

The MJM aims to be a **peer reviewed scientific journal** of the highest quality. We want to ensure that whatever data is published is true and any opinion expressed **important** to medical science.

We believe being Malaysian is our unique niche; our priority will be for scientific knowledge about **diseases found in Malaysia** and for the **practice of medicine in Malaysia**. The MJM will archive knowledge about the changing pattern of human diseases and our endeavours to overcome them. It will

also document **how medicine develops as a profession** in the nation. We will communicate and co-operate with other scientific journals in Malaysia.

We seek articles that are of **educational value** to doctors. We will consider all unsolicited articles **submitted** to the journal and will **commission** distinguished Malaysians to write relevant review articles. We want to help doctors make better decisions and be good at judging the value of scientific data. We want to help doctors write better, to be articulate and precise.

In summary, the mission of the Medical Journal of Malaysia is summed up in its name. We will journal the development of medicine in Malaysia.

Table I: Name, Year of Publication and Editors of Medical Journals in Malaysia from 1890 - 2011

| Period | Name of Journal | Editor |
|-----------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1890 | J Straits Med. Association | M F Simon |
| 1891 | | W G Ellis |
| 1892 | | T S Kerr |
| 1893 | | M F Simon |
| 1894-1903 | -no publication- | |
| 1904-1907 | J Malaya Branch BMA | J Kirk |
| 1908-1910 | -no publication- | |
| 1911-1912 | Malaya Med. Journal | G F Brooke |
| 1913-1925 | -no publication- | |
| 1926 | Malayan Med. Journal | T S Macaulay |
| 1927 | | J R Kay-Mouat |
| 1928-1929 | | G H Macalister |
| 1930-1937 | | GV Allen |
| 1937-1941 | J Malaya Branch BMA | " |
| 1942-1945 | -no publication- | |
| 1946-1947 | Med. J Malaya | D W G Faris |
| 1948-1954 | | D E C Mekie |
| 1954-1965 | | H M McGladery |
| 1965-1972 | | A A Sandosham |
| 1972-1977 | Med. J Malaysia | " |
| 1977-1987 | | P C Y Chen |
| 1987-1990 | | N Chandrasekharan |
| 1990-1998 | | V K E Lim |
| 1998-2008 | | J T Arokiasamy |
| 2008-2011 | | Azhar M Zain |
| 2011- | | K G Lim |