

New Philip Hospitals: A Bold Step Of Faith



From an unpretentious beginning as a nursing home to an ever expanding, thriving medical establishment, New Philip Hospitals, located in Kalutara, has journeyed through a challenging path to become what it is today. This state-of-the-art hospital provides a wide and comprehensive range of healthcare services backed by a committed team of medical specialists. Indrani Fernando, Chairperson and Managing Director of New Philip Hospitals, highlighted the Hospital's road to success and future plans for development.

By Haseena Razak and Shehara De Mel

Could you talk about how New Philip Hospitals first began and your involvement?

Phillip Memorial Nursing Home was established in 1955 by the late Dr. Leo Fernando, my father-in-law. After his death in 1980, the family took over the management of the hospital. However, a number of problems began to surface. A gradual decline put the hospital on the brink of closure in 1994. Therefore, I intervened with an offer to buy the hospital, but was discouraged, as it is very difficult to win back the confidence of the patients. Hence it was a single-handed decision. Then I ran into another problem: the banks were reluctant to fund my venture until one private bank finally agreed at a very high interest rate.

At the time I took up this challenge in 1994 there was only one building and I realised that there was not much I could do with very little resources. Hence I leased out the front section to HNB and was able to construct a new wing. I changed the name from Philip Memorial Nursing Home to Philip Hospital and it began to do very well. Following the settlement of the loan, I built the new hospital with BOI approval and the name was changed once again to New Philip Hospitals in 2005. It will go up to six floors and the present bed strength of 75 will increase to 150 beds with the expansion.

How did you manage to win back the public confidence?

That was not easy. We had to win not only the public confidence but also the consultants because they too had stopped coming. The first thing I did was to win the confidence of the consultants. I spoke to all of them including the Government consultants, explained my plan and they in turn offered their support and advice. They used to attend to some of my work, as I just had a handful of people when I bought over Philip. Today I have over 300 staff and 50 people working in the office.

In terms of winning patient confidence, I received patient feedback and every complaint was personally handled by me. Of course, there were some things you could do and some things you could not do. I also made it a point to tell the staff that it should be a personalised service, to get involved with the patients and families and get feedback. There was no marketing, only word of mouth. This is how I built up the practice together with feedback received from the doctors.

Could you elaborate on the different sections of the hospital and the services offered?

We are fully equipped with OPD, a theatre, the maternity department, the PBU (premature baby unit), and all other departments such as X-ray, scanning, cardiology, eye department, and a fully automated laboratory. The only facility we don't provide is the MRI facility. This is one aspect I will concentrate on next.

Recently I received the latest X-ray digital equipment. This displays very clear images which can be sent directly to the doctors computer in the consultation rooms. We also have 4D scanning. This 4D scanning facility was the third to come to Sri Lanka. In addition, we have a pharmacy, ambulance service, home service, courier service, tele-channeling and a very good ICU. We have established 25 Philip centres spanning the full district. These centres perform investigations and have laboratories while some provide ECG facilities as well. Our medical team includes surgeons, pediatricians, eye surgeons, radiologist, rheumatologist, orthopedic surgeon, neonatologist and even an immunologist. We practically provide everything. This is the best beyond Colombo.

What were the challenges you faced and how were they overcome?

For one thing I was not medically qualified and I was the first woman to venture into this; secondly, the Phillip name was not a name that the banks appreciated, and the amount of bills that had to be paid were huge. The other challenge was to convince the consultants. Yet, somehow they had confidence in me. I proved, at the beginning itself, that every time I did something I did it with meaning. The biggest challenge was that there were two other places that had come up and were doing well. Amidst all that, I had to rise up and it was not easy. I wanted to offer safe and quality healthcare, not to get a higher profit margin. The banking knowledge I had and coming from a business family helped. I like taking challenges and have confidence in myself. From the very beginning I ensured that everything was accounted for. You must be very professional in handling money matters particularly in the case of family-owned businesses.

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What are the future developments for the Hospital?

Well, I'm looking at expansion. I really want to have a mother and baby hospital. Today a number of resort hotels including five star hotels are our clients as well as

insurance companies,. Therefore I also want to gradually move into medical tourism and concentrate on that in a big way. I am currently working on connecting with international insurance companies and have already tied up with some international companies. Then, link up with travel agents as they bring in major tourism. Once that is done I want to partner with the hotels and offer medical packages thereby promoting medical tourism to the country.

Our greatest strength is the staff who remained even during the crisis period and also my husband Dr Christo Fernando, my brother Damascene Fernando and the family.