

State-Of-The-Art Healthcare Sector For The North

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Beginning as the first private hospital in the Jaffna District in 1979, the Jaffna Central Nursing Home provided the people of the northern region with access to exceptional healthcare solutions. Although expansion was difficult during the war, the hospital functioned until 1996, acting as a lifeline to the general public. In 2000 the hospital was able to reopen and - with the dawn of peace - is now in the process of considerable expansions. Scheduled to open its doors as the Northern Central Hospitals in November 2011, S P Samy, the Hospital's Founder Chairman and Dr P Keshavrajah, Director, described the journey towards the creation of the new hospital and the services it will

provide.

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Photography Menaka Aravinda*

What were your aspirations when you decided to build the Northern Central Hospital?

We realised that with the dawn of peace and improved transport and communication, people in the North deserve to have more to choose from for their healthcare needs. The capacity at present will not be enough to fulfill the expectations of the people for a better future. The new facilities will enable the patients to fulfill their healthcare needs in Jaffna closer to their homes while cutting down the cost and the inconvenience of going to Colombo or overseas. We commenced these operations with the hope of offering such an exceptional degree of service to the people. Our intention is to have the same standard as Colombo with regard to infrastructure. We want the facilities to be on par with any other private hospital in Sri Lanka.

What are the special healthcare services available for patients?

It is a hospital with a capacity of 100 beds with provision for an adequate number of ICUs. There are two operating theatres in the new complex besides the one in the existing Nursing Home. We are not concentrating on cardiac surgery or neurosurgery for the time being. That will be part of our future expansion plan. We perform all other basic surgeries. There are thirteen channeling centres as well as X-ray, ultrasound, CT scan and MRI facilities. We also have a well-equipped state-of-the-art diagnostic laboratory.

Where are you sourcing your healthcare practitioners and other staff from?

We have already started to train our nurses at the Dr Vettivelu Memorial Institute of Paramedical Studies in Jaffna. There are about 60 students so far and we have 40 nurses already working at the Nursing Home. We intend training other paramedical personnel as well. This includes physiotherapists, pharmacists, and MLTs. The response from various healthcare professionals has been very encouraging. And we expect a large response from such professionals when we start recruiting.

It is well to remember that before the start of the conflict in the early 1980s it had been a

common practice for people of the Northern Province living outside of Jaffna and overseas to return to Jaffna for healthcare needs such as the delivery of a baby, chronic ailments or convalescence because of the cultural links, help from relations and friends and familiar environment. When we start this hospital, we can be sure that people stationed outside of the Northern Province or overseas will want to come back to Jaffna to a friendlier and more comfortable environment closer to their homes as has been the practice before the conflict.

What were the challenges you faced in constructing the hospital?

In any given task there will be challenges. This was not much of a hurdle since we have been running this hospital for 31 years. We have that experience. Our success and popularity in the past have been attributable to the whole-hearted cooperation of the health care professionals in Jaffna as well as other sectors and we are confident that we will continue to have the same cooperation and dedication in our new endeavours too.

Competition is one of the healthy challenges that we face. Therefore, we feel that a healthy competition will be beneficial to the health sector, ultimately benefitting the people. That is a challenge that we are confident we will overcome.

Our Main Achievement Will Be Bringing Affordable, Reliable And The Latest Healthcare Facilities To The People Of The North In A More Familiar, Homely And Culturally Friendly Environment.

How do you think the public will respond to the Northern Central Hospital?

The people believe in us. That is why we have got this far. As a private nursing home we have the largest number of patients in Jaffna. Moreover, we are happy to say that the Central Nursing Home is recognised among people. Even when we wanted to obtain a loan, it was approved without hesitation and the bank manager immediately knew about the hospital which made it easier for us. The banking sector has welcomed our project and agreed to offer necessary assistance. This bears testimony to our dedicated service in the past and the faith that people have in us. Earning the trust and good will of the people of Jaffna has been our greatest investment. That is what gave us the courage to go ahead with such a big investment in Jaffna. The Management for its part will give of their best.

Are you thinking of more expansions for the future?

Our vision for the future is to have all the specialties that are available in other parts of Sri Lanka. We intend to start regional centres in places such as Kilinochchi, Vavuniya, Mannar

and Mullaitivu. As a result, people in those areas will have direct access to the services of the Northern Central Hospital in Jaffna, as during an emergency they can always be transferred there. We also plan to have mobile clinics, home care services for people who want to be cared for in their home environment and an ambulance service to help people with transport difficulties.

Any concluding remarks?

We want to give the best to the people of Jaffna. The people have suffered and have been deprived for long and they deserve to have more options to choose from with regard to their healthcare needs. Therefore, we want to set a standard to the services and pricing. We plan to offer reasonable rates, comparatively less than hospitals in Colombo. This is not with the intention of competing or of depriving hospitals in Colombo of patients, but we want to enhance the services we have been rendering all these years to the public of the Northern Province. Our main achievement will be bringing affordable, reliable and the latest healthcare facilities to the people of the North in a more familiar, homely and culturally friendly environment.

We believe every business has the service side of it, and it is the service we have been providing to the people that has helped us rise. Regardless of whether it is a hospital or any other business, one has to serve the people when there is a need. It is only then that people will be protected by business.



