

## A Difficult Gestation and Painful Labor The Birth of Bangkok Hospital

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Here is a brief history of Bangkok Hospital, told from the perspective of someone who was involved with it for most of his life. I recall the days of its initial conception, all the way through its establishment, beginning of operations, and progressive expansion up to the present day.

Bangkok Hospital commenced due to the aspirations of three groups of physicians who wished to establish a state-of-art private hospital in Thailand, which would be able to provide topflight medical standards and nursing care to suffering people. The first shareholder meeting was called on 24th August, 1969 and it was agreed to name the hospital as “*Bangkok Hospital*”. The mission of Bangkok Hospital was later defined as follows:

1. Bangkok Hospital should be a modern private hospital with advanced medical techniques, and state-of-the-art medical equipment.
2. Bangkok Hospital should lighten the burden of government hospitals which was continually growing heavier from the increase of patients.
3. Bangkok Hospital should be a place that would attract physicians that had graduated from or were practicing overseas to come back to Thailand.
4. Bangkok Hospital should promote advances in medicine and nursing care and disseminate medical knowledge to the public.
5. Bangkok Hospital should collaborate with international medical institutes.



On 30th October, 1969, the company was registered at the Department of Economics, Thailand, as “*Bangkok Dusit Medical Services Company Limited*”. The registered capital was 10 million Baht. At that time, it was an immense sum and raising the funds was challenging. The stock was divided into 10,000 shares, priced at 1,000 baht each. The founding team primarily desired to sell stocks to people in the medical field because it was thought

appropriate to have them as owners. The team approached many physicians, dentists, pharmacists, and nurses to invest but most people underestimated the possibilities of success. Some laughed; some were standoffish; some disregarded the invitation and others said evasively “*no money*”. Some people (in the interests of a quiet life) were persuaded to buy “*one share*”.



A lot of stock remained unsold. In order to attract more investors, the team agreed to extend the invitation to people outside of medical circles and also offered the preliminary down payment of one third, with the balance to be paid later. When ten thousand shares were finally sold, the team was exhausted. By offering a preliminary payment at one third of stock price, it was expected that the first installment of approximately 3 million Baht would be enough to cover the first month's expenses. However, by the due date of the second installment, some stockholders still owed the first installment.

In the meantime, the location for establishing a hospital was explored. Subsequently, 8,000 square meters of land at Soi Soonvijai, New Petchburi Rd., Bangkok District, Bangkok, nearby the Thai Medical Association was purchased. In those days the land was quite far from the entrance to the "Soi Soonvijai" and might be likened to an island in the sea. The public road leading to the hospital, surrounded by fields and unoccupied area, was rough and muddy when it rained. The streetlights of New Petchburi Road were not as bright as present and there were no public lights along the road to hospital so it was really dark at night. When the land contract was made and the deposit paid, the balance payment was scheduled for three months later. The cost of the land alone was already over a third of our invested capital.

The construction company experienced challenges dealing with us. We had to delay payments to them many times due to inadequate cash flow. Outstanding stock payment receivables still had not been successfully collected. I felt very guilty towards the owner of the construction company. Once he came to see me at my office and cried because our cheque was unredeemable. It took hours to console him by promising that this problem would be solved soon. I knew that the loss of liquidity was due to uncollected stock payments and that

eventually we would have adequate cash to pay for the construction.

Then the payment of land became due. The landowner requested the outstanding payment. We asked her to extend the credit but our negotiations were unsuccessful. The owner insisted on terminating the contract and seizing the deposit. We felt really discouraged, depressed, and exhausted. We decided to approach the owner's husband in the hope of mediation and explain our intentions to enhance Thai public health by establishing a first rate hospital and we fully disclosed our financial situation. Luckily, the landowner's husband well understood our crisis and provided us the necessary financial support by extending the period of payment. I have never stopped appreciating the understanding and kindness he offered us: without his support, Bangkok Hospital could not have been completed.

However, our problems were not over. The construction was stopped because there was no more money. Every Board Director exerted effort to try to solve the financial crisis. Finally the President of the Thai Military Bank agreed to support our business by investing in one million stocks and granting a loan. Thereafter, the construction of Bangkok Hospital was finally completed and could start providing service.

We were struggling financially for 3 years from the date that we decided to set up the hospital, to the grand opening day on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1972. On that day, we were honored that the illustrious monk, His Eminence Somdej Phra Wanrat was active in the ceremony. A merit making ritual was performed around the hospital. We held this day as the hospital's birthday. At the entrance to the hospital, there was a big sign with shiny brass letters reading "Bangkok Hospital". As His Eminence Somdej Phra Wanrat anointed the signage, it was a very impressive moment for all of us. However, early next morning, there



was tumult amongst the staff because all of the brass letters had disappeared. No one ever discovered who had stolen our letters.

As aforementioned, the hospital location was not the well inhabited residential area it is today but used to be surrounded by vacant land. If we looked out at the view from the second or third floor, we would feel lonely. At night, looking towards the hospital from the Medical Association, we could see the brightness from our hospital illuminating the surrounding darkness. There was only the sound of frogs and insects. The municipality informed us that the dark unlit road to hospital did not belong to the government but that the landowner could not be found therefore the municipality could not install public lights in that area. The hospital decided to install public lights along the road. In the early days our nurses had the additional job of cleaning up the dead insects attracted to the hospital lights at night, of which there were many, because we were surrounded by fields.

The road to the hospital created continual problems. We had to pay a lot of for its upkeep. Whenever there was heavy rain, it flooded. Transportation was hindered because of mud. The flood crisis in Thailand of 1983 cost us millions of baht for maintenance. Eventually, a tarmac road was successfully constructed. After the road surface

was improved, the access to the hospital was still not convenient enough for people because there was no public transport. It thus became necessary for the hospital to provide a shuttle bus service between New Petchburi Road and the hospital for patients. We were also pleased to offer some benefits to the general public by offering our shuttle bus service for their use as well as for our patients and staff. Now we have many shuttle buses serving a variety of destinations all over Bangkok.

That was the early days and I have only mentioned some of the difficulties. Much has changed since. We've continued building and established many specialized clinics. Bangkok Hospital Group is now the kingdom's largest hospital operator with 28 network locations throughout Thailand. We continue to fulfill our mission and we have lots of plans for future developments. I write as ex-Chairman of the Board of Directors, and when I think of the developments from the past until now, I feel delighted and proud to have been part of this. Now I am elderly, inevitably I have also become a patient in our hospital, and been treated by our neurology, cardiac, kidney and rehabilitation specialists. I have then experienced in a different way, the respect, friendliness, and sincere support of our competent and knowledgeable staff and I can truly say from my own experience that we continue to realize our dream:

**“Bangkok Hospital is where advances in medicine meet with compassion.”**

