

Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Siriraj Medical School: 90th Anniversary

Manee Piya-Anant, M.D., Saifon Chwanpaiboon, M.D.

Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Faculty of Medicine Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University, Bangkok 10700, Thailand.

Siriraj Med J 2007; 59: 335-338

E-journal: <http://www.sirirajmedj.com>

Since its foundation in 1917, the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Siriraj Medical School has been consistently developed in all aspects: academic, social service, and administration, including the construction of new and modern buildings to answer the vital need of the department's human resource ranging from instructors, students and nurses, resulting in the high performance of the department and the satisfaction of all involved in all areas: instruction, research, administration, and patients. It is reported that the death rate of mothers and children has decreased, and the rate of post operative infection per month is low. The evidence that has marked the technological progress of the department is an assisted reproduction and the laparoscopic surgery, which has greatly satisfied most patients. Moreover, the department has always encouraged development in instruction.

Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology before 1917

Traditionally, after giving birth, a mother would wear a little piece of cloth called ผ้าเตี่ยว and lie on a narrow plank, under which a stove was placed to warm her for the length of 15 days. This was believed to be good for the mother's health. Yet, the risky side of it was neglected if the mother was infected or had a fever, which could become fatal. There was an incident when Piam, one of the wives in the house of the high-ranked official, Krom Muen Prab Poraphak, gave birth and was dead since she had a high fever and was forced to observe the traditional practice of lying on a narrow plank over the stove. After that the master of the house ordered all of his wives not to be treated by the traditional practice any more and he asked a medical doctor, Gavan, to take care of them instead. Then all of his wives survived after giving birth.

When Her Majesty the Queen gave birth to Prince Usadang Dejawut, Krom Muen Prab Poraphak asked her permission to present the advantage of a modern medical treatment for delivery. H.M. the Queen was impressed and asked for H.M. the King's permission to discontinue the traditional practice of giving birth in the royal palace.

However, in 1888, when Siriraj Medical Hospital was beginning to operate, Doctor Gavan took care of childbirth, while the Minister of the Medical Department was trying to dissuade the mothers not to use the traditional practice,

but it was not successful until H.M. the Queen offered the mothers an amount of 4 baht if they would not use the traditional practice. What followed was an amazing achievement for the hospital since more mothers stopped using the traditional practice since they saw other mothers being healthy without being treated by such practice, yet being offered some money as well. The close of the traditional practice was one of the milestones in the history of Thailand's obstetrics.

Approximately in 1890, King Rama VV established the first medical school in Siriraj hospital, and the teaching of obstetrics was started, which was then called “ครรภ์านุเคราะห์”. In the beginning, the teaching was much below standard and the curriculum was not settled. The study took only 3 years and the students had to study both the traditional and modern medicine.

Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology: A brief account

In 1917, King Rama VI ordered the transformation of the former Civil School founded by King Rama V into Chulalongkorn University in honor of King Rama V, King Chulalongkorn the Great. Eleven days later, King Rama VI ordered the Medical School, Siriraj hospital, to affiliate with Culalongkorn University, and the graduates would be conferred with bachelor degrees. From then on, the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology started giving lessons and has continued for 90 years already.

In 1942, the Medical University was established and the Medical School at Siriraj Hospital was affiliated with this University.

In 1969, the Medical University has been changed to Mahidol University.

Development of instruction in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology

The instruction in obstetrics and gynecology was firstly called ครรภ์านุเคราะห์, which included both the traditional and modern medicine. The quality of instruction was average but the curriculum was not yet settled.

During 1923-1935, there was a cooperation between the Rockefeller Foundation and Thailand to improve Thailand's medical instructional system and eventually the system met an international standard. An instrumental person to make this successful was Prince Songkla Nakarin.

To sum up, what the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology benefited from Rockefeller Foundation was as follows.

During 1926-1931, the foundation assigned Professor G.W. Theobald and Professor Carl Bachman as the Heads of the Department.

The foundation offered the scholarship for the professors in the department. The scholarship holders were Professor Tuem Bunnag, Professor Uuem Sila-Oon and Luang Proma-that Wethee (Maiprom Sreeswat).

Formerly, the administrative board in the Medical University at Siriraj Hospital was responsible for all the curricula. The Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology offered the two-year clinical instruction scheduled for 8 weeks per academic year. After graduation, the graduates had to attend a one-year internship and they were required to work at the department for 12 weeks.

In 1980, the improved curriculum required a one-year pre medical, a two-year pre-clinical, a one-year clinical and a one-year practicum or extern. Also a block system for the second-year clinical was provided in order that the instruction and the evaluation would be simultaneously completed. For the fifth-year students, the instruction took 12 weeks and the students would study both obstetrics and gynecology. For the sixth-year students, there was a eight-week practicum. However, this scheme made it rather uncomfortable for other departments which were forced to follow the block system, resulting in the irrelevance of the subject matters.

In 1984, according to the improved curriculum, which focused on the practicum for the sixth-year students, the students were trained in the department. The problem arose when the number of students was increasing, unmatched with a number of the medical residents, which resulted in the inefficiency of the skills to be practiced. It was thus necessary that the students be sent to practice at many other additional hospitals: Wachira hospital, Thaksin hospital, Chareonkrung Pracharak hospital, Lerdsin hospital, Police hospital, Somdej Phra Pinklao hospital nad Phras Nangklao hospital.

In 1990, another improvement in the curriculum was proposed. The instruction in the fourth and the fifth years took six weeks per academic year and both obstetrics and gynecology was taught in both years to prevent the repetition in the teaching schedule.

In 2000, the consensus of the department concerning the curriculum was that the instruction in each academic year be divided in order to improve the quality of instruction. The fourth-year students and the fifth-year students were required to study gynecology and obstetrics respectively. It was expected that the teaching would be more convenient and the students would not feel so stressful. This practice has still been employed up to now.

At present, the practice is that the sixth-year students spend four weeks working in different sections in the department and another four weeks working in additional hospitals.

Development of residency training

The curriculum on residency training was initially not settled. Those interested could apply for the residency training in the department after graduation and eventually they could be assigned the teaching position or they could resign. The number of medical residents in each year was not fixed, neither was the number of working years.

In 1970, the association of Thailand's obstetrics and gynecology was founded with Professor Jajaval Osathanondh

as the first chairman. After that the three-year special training course for obstetrics and gynecology was initiated for medical residents and they would enter the first examination to be awarded the certificate from the Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology offered in 1973. In fact, the number of department's medical residents varied. Later, the Association set that the number of medical residents would be 14 per year. Generally all 14 seats were filled up each year and all of them passed the examination.

Development of the Department's Buildings

The department has continuously improved its buildings. The pride of the department was the first two buildings constructed between 1928-1929 with the money given by King RamaVII.

These were two-storey buildings called Tee Pet building and Jutathut building in commemoration of the two Princes : Prince Tre Pet Ruttamrong and Prince Jutathut Taradilok. An obstetrics ward was on the second floor of both buildings while a gynecology ward was on the first floor of Tee Pet building and a septic ward was on the first floor of Jutathut building.

In 1931, Professor Tuem Bunnag decided to have a new building built on the west side of Jutathut building, which was not able to accommodate the department's needs for service and instruction. He planned to set a laboratory room and a medical record room on the upper floor but it was rearranged into a dormitory for lady medical students whose number was increasing. Both the laboratory room and medical record room were moved to the first floor where there were also classrooms and study rooms.

Professor Tuem Bunnag proposed building a new operating room for the department of obstetrics and gynecology since before World War II, there were only two operating rooms at the operating building for all departments: Department of Surgery, Department of Ophthalmology, Department of Rhinolaryngology and Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. The Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology's operating schedule was on Tuesday and Friday. After operating, the patients were to be carried back to the department's building opposite the operating building where there was no cover way to protect the patients while being carried back. A temporary operating room was then built using the planks from the old building at Nontaburi and the department also asked for donation. In 1945, this temporary operating room had been in use for quite some time.

In 1952, Lek Kiangsiri donated money to build a new one-storey building situated between Tee Pet and Jutathut buildings with three operating rooms, one visiting room and a pelvic examination room. The number of patients was increasing so the old wooden building was still in use to accommodate the patients with gynecological problems.

In 1953, the new budget to add one more floor at Tee Pet building to accommodate an increasing number of patients was allowed and this new floor located a ward for private accommodation, which was a critical problem the department was facing.

In 1954, Mrs.Uun Posayajinda donated money to complete the old building, a part of which Lek Kinangsiri had donated, and it was finished in 1955.

In 1959, the new budget to build a four-storey building to the West was allowed. The first floor was an office, the second floor a newborn unit and the third and fourth were a single private wards.

During the period when Professor Chatchawan

Ausotthanon was the the head of department, the budget to build a four-storey building parallel to the East wing of Tee Pet building was allowed and the construction was completed in 1965. The first floor was an out patient ward, the second floor a regular labor ward, the third floor was a complicated obstetrics ward and the fourth floor was an office.

In 1965, the Pornpibul donated money to add one more floor to the building which was initially donated by Lek Kiangsiri and Mrs.Uun Posayajinda. Thus, this building had three floors which were donated by three donors and the building was called after them : Kiangsiri, Uun Posayajinda and Pornpibul. On the third floor was a private labor ward.

In 1972, while Professor Praphan Areemitr M.D. was the head of department, the budget to build a new classroom building was allowed to replace the old one (which was built in 1931). This old building was renovated and it is still in use now.

In 1980, due to the lack of space and an increasing number of patients, the department asked for more budget, along with the financial support from the Government Lottery Office, to build a new Juthatut building in place of the old one. This new Juthatut was 13 storeys high to accommodate more patients and it has been properly renovated and is still in use now.

However, the department found it very necessary to have more buildings to answer the needs of the people and the department's missions either in giving instruction or carrying out research. The buildings were too small and they were becoming too old to be renovated. Clinical Professor Prapast Peanlerd, the head of department, thus, decided to build more spacious building to replace all existing small old buildings: Tee Pet, Private Labor Ward, Labor Ward, and the Three Names (Kiangsiri, Uun Posayajinda and Pornpibul) and Attakawee Sunthorn building which was a small building belonging to the department of Pediatrics. In 1999, the government budget was allotted for the department to build a 17-storey building, which was named in honor of the centenary anniversary of His Majesty the King's Mother. This building covers an area of 35,000 square meters. Two underground floors are parking lots and the remaining fifteen floors above are all the department's working units. This building is the pride of the department since it is very spacious and it meets the international service standard in accommodating the patients, which is the mission required from the department.

Moreover, the department has maintained other old buildings : Juthatut and Classroom building, so that they can still be in proper use, making facilities for the department to perform its duty to meet the required mission and vision.

Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology : a brief account on administration

Since the department's establishment, there have been 17 head of departments whose titles have been changed respectively: during 1917-1925 it was called “แม่กองสูติกรรม”, during 1926- 1969, it was called “หัวหน้าแผนก” (section head) and after 1969 until now it is called หัวหน้าภาควิชา (department head). A list of names of the heads of department during 90 years of the department is as follows:

1917 - 1920 Phraya Wechaitpilas (Jaras Wipataphat)
1920 - 1925 Luang Waitayate Tharangoon
(Chue Issarangoon Na Ayutthaya)

1926 - 1929 Professor Geoffrey William Theobald M.D.
1929 - 1931 Professor Carl Bachman M.D.
1931 - 1958 Professor Tuem Bunnag M.D.
1958 - 1964 Professor Jajaval Osathanondh M.D.
1964 - 1967 Professor Thara Sukawat M.D.
1967 - 1969 Professor M.R. Songsree Katesing M.D.
1969 - 1983 Professor Praphan Areemitr M.D.
1983 - 1984 Professor Saroj Porapakkham M.D.
1984 - 1987 Honorary Clinical Professor Chalaem Wattananusan M.D.
1987 - 1991 Honorary Professor Suporn Koetsawang M.D.
1991 - 1994 Honorary Professor Sommai Tungsuwan M.D.
1994 - 1996 Honorary Clinical Professor Prapas Peanlerd M.D.
1996 - 2000 Honorary Clinical Professor Somchai Nuangtan M.D.
2000 - 2004 Honorary Clinical Professor Chaiporn Patrakom M.D.
2004 - 2006 Clinical Professor Manee Piya-Anant M.D.

All these leaders of the department have contributed a lot for the department in various aspects : vision, working plan and operation for academic, service, research and cultural preservation. Eventually, the department's culture has been deeply rooted and has been practiced until now.

What matters most in giving lessons and service is that both should be simultaneously done since a diagnosis requires both a patient's background information, a doctor's consultation skill and various other skills.

In fact, before giving consultation, it is very important that a patient must give an accurate and detailed information on her married life and sexual relations. However, to examine a virgin's genital organs is very sensitive; therefore, it is important to ask for permission first.

Knowledge and skill is also very essential. Formerly, there was a little good equipment, so a doctor had to be good both in examination skill and manual skill in order to achieve an accurate diagnosis. Even now, despite more modern equipment being provided, its cost is still too high to afford, and the risk in examination is likely to occur if the information is not enough or not accurate. Therefore, the skill and knowledge of a doctor is vital to the examination procedure.

Also, what is required is an effectiveness of professional expertise ; therefore, during an internship, especially in a district hospital countrywide, the interns must keep on practicing their skill. With this in mind, the department has always assigned all instructors to put all efforts to strengthen the students' expertise regardless of how much work the instructors have to do. This has been the culture of the department since it was founded.

Furthermore, a quick and careful decision is needed while working in a labor room since an immediate risk can occur with both mother and baby. Thus, obstetricians may have to act as carefully and quickly as possible for the safety of both mother and baby.

The Pride of the department

To commemorate the 90th anniversary, the department wished to have a complete account of the department's history so that all involved would be proud of the fame and glory of the department and would be useful for those interested.

The most impressive event the department is always most honored about is the kindness having been given by the Chakri Dynasty : King Rama VII offered that the first

buildings of the department, Tre Pet and Juthatut, to be built with his money in commemoration of his two Brothers, Prince Tre Pet Ruttamrong and Prince Jutathut Taradilok. Later, the first scholarship holder for Songkla Nakarin scholarship, Tuem Bunnag, was educated in Switzerland. Then, he was awarded the Rockefeller scholarship to Germany. Not long after returning to work at the department, he was appointed head of department and was later assigned to be the member of the board to assist His Majesty the Queen's delivery of the Crown Prince, Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and Her Royal Highness Princess Julaporn Walailak. The department also feels so much honored to be assigned to humbly assist in the delivery of Prince Theepangkorn, His Majesty the King's nephew. The department has always regarded the humble service to the Royal family as an immeasurable and auspicious contribution.

Other systematic working models having been set by the department have become common practice until now are as follows.

Professor Tuem Bunnag who had been the head of department for 27 years did actually set the model for both instruction and administration in such a systematic manner that the practice is still observed until now. The clinical practice in the department is very effective. This is achieved only through hard work and strong determination. Yet, the success has encouraged all to keep on doing the best. However, the number of mothers giving birth now has not outnumbered an increasing number of medical student so the number of cases is 3 per medical student when compared to the former number of cases, which was 15 cases per medical student.

Professor Tuem Bunnag also initiated the standard second opinion pelvic examination where he, with another medical student, would be in an outpatient ward daily to consider all cases. This has been in practice up to now because it helps avoid complaints to a certain extent.

Another practice having been done since Professor Tuem Bunnag was the head of department is a regular shift after office hours in case of emergency. Professor Tuem himself used to attend a 24-hour observation and now it is a common practice in the department to have one senior doctor at hand in the office after working hours.

In 1937, Professor Thara Sukawat M.D. set up a laboratory for surgical tissue after he came back from Germany so the department started to have its own pathological unit. Though this unit has been merged into the department of Pathology, some instructors from the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology do help analyze the pathological result.

Cytological examination through papanicoloua smear, the department started in 1939 initiated by Associate Professor Cheab Nirundorn M.D. Now this task is still under the department's supervision and it has gradually improved.

Doctor Carl Bachman initiated organizing medical records and medical statistics. Then in 1935, Professor San Sreepen M.D., continued to improve the task and finally it is accepted that the department's registration system is complete and accurate, which has set an example for other departments.

Another culture of the department is frugality, which has been handed down to this very generation. In World War II, Siriraj Hospital was not safe since it was located so very near to Bangkoknoi train station. In 1945, once there was a severe air raid, causing a labor room in the hospital to be on fire but fortunately it was rescued.

However, it was necessary that the hospital was relocated to an administration building and in the Girls' School of Nontaburi province. One more wooden unit was built here to accommodate the patients. After the war, Siriraj Hospital moved back. Professor Tuem Bunnag then dismantled the wooden unit and reconstructed a temporary operating room and it was used for many years. Another example of the department's economical practice is the department's policy to use safety medicine like anti-septic because it is much cheaper, but safe and effective but it is not in favor by the new generation.

Another culture on working routine is that most come to the office as early as 7.00 am. At 7.30 am, the instruction usually starts with examining a student's report individually and visiting an out-patient ward. By 9.00 am, all doctors on duty would be visiting the patients, except those who may have a teaching schedule or any other service work.

Professor Tuem Bunnag has planted the seed of unity and cooperation among doctors and nurses. Once he mentioned that this practice should be continued and preserved, and his wish has always been followed. The living proof of this unity is present in the department here and now.

Professor Jajaval Osathanondh M.D., is another pride of the department for his distinguished administrative skills. Here is a list of his positions.

1948 - 1958	Director of Siriraj Hospital
1958 - 1964	Head Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology
1958 - 1963	Dean of Siriraj Medical School
1964 - 1969	Rector of the University of Medicine
1965	Acting Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University and Director of Relief Unit and Health Unit, Thai Red Cross
1966 - 1970	Acting Dean of Pharmacology Department, Chulalongkorn University
1969-1971	The first Rector of Mahidol University
1970	The first President of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Association
1971- 1979	Acting Dean of the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities

In writing this article, the writers owe many thanks to many resourceful persons like Clinical Professor Prapas Peanlued, Associate Professor Sanjai Sangvichien M.D., Assistant Professor Uapong Jaturatamrong M.D., and Assistant Professor Suthi Sankarut M.D., in recollecting useful information about the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, which has made it possible for the writers to complete this writing.

REFERENCES

1. One -Hundred-Year Anniversary of Siriraj: History and Development, published on One -Hundred-Year Anniversary, 26 April 1988
2. Seventy-Year-Old Anniversary of Jajaval Osathanondh M.D. 5 February 1993
3. One -Hundred -Year Anniversary of Prince Juthatut published in 1992
4. In Commemoration of Professor Tuem Bunnag M.D. on His 111th Anniversary, 3 March 2005
5. Wechanisit 1959-1960
6. Wechanisit 1935, Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University
7. Wechanisit 1972