

Health care paves the way for gospel in Indonesia

August 21, 2024

EAST JAVA, Indonesia (BP)—A health care triad—including a Baptist hospital, a rural clinic and a nursing college—in East Java is reaching far beyond the island's, and even the country's, borders.

The history of Southern Baptist work in Indonesia is long, dating back to 1951, when missionaries first went to the island nation. Medical work wasn't far behind, and it soon became a key strategy for gospel access.



From its beginning in 1955, the Kediri Baptist Hospital has focused on excellent medical care with the vision of the Great Commission. (IMB Photo)

By 1955, nurses Ruth Ford and Everly Hayes and Dr. Kathleen Jones had started the Kediri Baptist Hospital. For decades medical doctors sent through the International Mission Board—formerly Foreign Mission Board—remained in leadership and service.

To provide trained nurses to serve at the hospital, IMB missionary nurse Virginia Miles founded Kediri Baptist Hospital Health College in 1961.

Today, the medical facilities are led by Indonesian medical professionals committed to the gospel and the vision to use health care to make the gospel known to all nations.

Indonesian Baptists work closely with the International Mission Board to maximize the reach of the gospel and lead other Christian health care professionals to meet physical and spiritual needs.

Emphasis on the Great Commission

IMB missionary Jacob Stanley serves as a liaison between the medical facilities in Kediri, Indonesian Baptists and health care professionals in the United States. He explained how an emphasis on the Great Commission was woven into the history of the medical work in this area.

“More than 60 churches, still in existence today, can trace their roots to the evangelistic work of the Kediri Baptist Hospital,” Stanley said. “Evangelism was part of the founding.”

On a typical day at the Kediri Baptist Hospital, all beds are full, and expectant mothers eagerly wait for their turn in the newly renovated maternity ward.

As is common in Indonesia, family members of patients wait at the hospital, sometimes days, resting on blankets laid out in hallways. Not all rooms are air conditioned, but the Indonesians do not seem bothered by the constant heat and humidity.

The hospital’s director, Dr. Iva Yuana, takes time to greet family members warmly, as she steps around them moving through the halls. She doesn’t stay in her office for long, because she continues to practice pediatric medicine.

Yuana considers the facility to be behind the times, according to world

medical standards. Still, the hospital thrives as a trusted source for excellent health care.

Approximately 500 students attend the health college, all with a goal to receive a degree in nursing. The college is open to men and women and students of all faiths. Half of the students are Muslim. All students participate in Bible study and chapel services.

Safe place for spiritual inquiry

The college has become a safe place to ask questions and read the Bible, even for those who would be forbidden from these activities in their homes. Indonesia remains the country with the largest concentration of Muslims in the world.

The college is also intentional to train Christian nurses as missionaries, who will be presented with opportunities to practice medicine in unreached areas. The nursing college intentionally presents requests from other countries to students who are willing to be trained in evangelism, in addition to their medical training.

Six students who passed a Japanese-language course are preparing for work in Japan. They will serve in health care facilities and will also be connected with IMB missionaries and Japanese churches to increase the reach of the gospel in East Asia.

Opportunities to serve in countries closed to the gospel or missionary presence also are increasing, as health care needs around the world continue to grow.

Clinic meets needs in rural area

The most recent addition to Baptist health care facilities is the Eternal Peace Clinic. In 2020, the clinic opened its doors to rural community residents who can receive both medical and dental care. The clinic includes a pharmacy, so those without transportation or without the funds to travel to the city can get the care and the medicines they need.

Staff at Eternal Peace Clinic are trained to pray with patients and engage them in gospel conversations while they wait to see the doctor or stand in line for prescriptions to be filled. Home visits provide opportunities for follow-up to physical and spiritual conditions.

Stanley said he has great respect for the work of Indonesian leaders and wants to increase opportunities for health care professionals and churches in the United States to partner with the work being done through the facilities in Indonesia.

Walking through the facilities, Stanley points out equipment donated by churches, even a CPR dummy that he himself carried through immigration on a return trip from the United States. In fact, the Eternal Peace Clinic was built through contributions to IMB's health care ministries.

Historically, this key work with the Indonesian Baptists has led to "churches planting churches that plant churches," Stanley said. "We just need more people to join the vision of how health care strategies are reaching the lost with the gospel."