

Short communication

THE BEGINNINGS OF NEUROLOGICAL SERVICES IN HYDERABAD

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ABSTRACT

The combined military hospital located at Secunderabad seen the beginnings of neurological services in our country during the British India rule. Full time neurologist and neurosurgeons were posted at this military hospital and their services were available not only in India but in neighboring countries as well.

Key words: Neurological services, Combined military hospital, Secunderabad.

Introduction:

Pioneer general surgeons and physicians managed neurological diseases before the advent of fulltime organized neurosurgical and neurological departments that commenced at Vellore in 1949 in our country. Neurological society of India and neurology India that started in 1950 and 1953 respectively contributed a great deal for the advancement of clinical neurosciences in our country¹. But the beginnings of clinical neurosciences commenced before independence in the British military establishment in our country. It was the combined military hospital at Tirumalgiri, which was spelled by British as Trimelgherry in Secunderabad, which witnessed the beginnings of neurological services at Hyderabad, if not in India.

Neurological services at the hospital:

The Combined military hospital at Secunderabad was a major military hospital for about one hundred years for the British and it had bed strength of 500 (Fig. Left). This hospital was built as a fort with moat and stores to last for months in case of attack. This hospital was developed by the British after the first war of independence in 1857AD. It had all the specialties and the neurological services were developed and added to it during 1944-1947 AD. Three neurosurgeons who worked at this hospital during 1944-1947 were Richard H. Hannah (1915-2000 AD), Eric A. Turner and John McEwen Potter (1920-2002 AD) and

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the neurologist was Kenneth W G. Heath field. All of them moved to England after our independence and they made a remarkable contribution to neurology and neurosurgery in that country. Truly they were the first fulltime neurological consultants in our country and they were sent to India with the Royal Army Medical Corps. All of their services were sought after not only by the military establishment where they worked but also by the civil population in Hyderabad, India and even in neighboring countries. All of them started their careers during the Second World War and then were posted at British military hospitals at Pune, Colaba for a short period and then worked at Tirumalgiri in Secunderabad.. First neurosurgeon to work during 1944-1946 was Hannah who was followed by Turner. Potter succeeded the latter in December 1946 and continued till October of 1947. Throughout this period the neurologist at the hospital was Heath field. All the neurosurgeons dealt with trauma and also other diseases such as brain tumors. For example Potter excised a meningioma on 15th march 1947 and a cystic glioma on 10th January 1947 at Military hospital and the anesthetist on these two occasions was Major Reichmann. They performed procedures like ventriculography, which was followed by surgery and this, was the practice in those days. They have operated also at Osmania general hospital in Hyderabad. Richard Hannah was the first neurosurgeon in India and he was attached to the mobile neurosurgical unit at Pune in December 1944 and then shifted to Secunderabad where he continued till June 1946.Hannah was born in Calgary in Canada and moved to England where he was trained and he spent about three years in India (Fig. Center). According to his wife Kay he was very busy as was the only neurosurgeon available in India then ². In England he developed the epilepsy surgery center in Liverpool of which he was the director for 21 years. British medical journal in its obituary cited that 'Hannah learnt his surgical craft in India' ³.Turner took over from Hannah and was there at Secunderabad for about 5-6 months. Turner moved to England and he settled down in Birmingham. He was one of the first in England to devote to stereotactic surgery of the brain. Potter was called to attend the neurosurgical problems in other parts of India as well as in neighboring countries such as Burma. All of them contributed papers to such journals as British journal of surgery, British medical journal, Lancet, Brain, Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry, Nature, Journal neurosurgery etc. Their early papers were based on war experiences as well as their clinical practices in India.

Potter published 113 papers covering all aspects of neurosurgery between 1947 and 1992 (fig. Right).His great contribution was on management of neuro-trauma, which guided care of head injured around the world. The times of London aptly described him as a

‘surgeon who went to the frontline to help injured troops and who later published an influential study on head injuries’. Turner published 40 papers during 1945 and 1982 starting with management 1200 penetrating brain wounds in the war to stereotactic surgery of the brain. Pub med alone lists 56 papers by Heath field in major neurological journals covering all aspects of neurological practice and his great contribution was related to movement disorders. Heath field met his wife at Secunderabad and he called his house in London as Trimelgherry. Hannah started his British career with a basic physiological research, which was followed by practice of neurosurgical diseases including surgery for epilepsy.



Figure: **Left:** Military hospital in Secunderabad; **Center:** Richard H. Hannah, the first neurosurgeon in India; **Right:** John M. Potter-The last British neurosurgeon who moved to Oxford later.

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