

# Nation's first kidney specialist has seen it all

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Dr Satwant Singh Gill, the first nephrologist in Malaysia, has seen the advances made in the treatment of kidney diseases the last 50 years.

A fresh-faced and eager Dr Gill, who graduated from the University of Malaya in Singapore in 1957, was posted to ward 13 of Kuala Lumpur General Hospital under Dr Peter de Hart.

Dr de Hart fed patients who suffered kidney failure with a diet (rice and orange juice) and electrolytes.

In 1963, he became a Member of the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh (MRCPE) and left government service and joined Assunta Hospital as a consultant physician.

In 1964, Dr Gill learned about a Lederle International fellowship for training in the United States.

"It was also at that time we heard of patients with end stage renal failure being kept alive for four years by Prof Belding Scribner at the University of Washington."

Dr Gill accepted the offer and went to Seattle the next year to work under Scribner in renal medicine.

On his return in 1966, Dr Gill started with intermittent peritoneal dialysis (using the peritoneum, a membrane that lines the abdomen and covers the abdominal organs, as a filter).

Towards the end of 1966, a 22-year-old teacher, Harry Kydd, was admitted with kidney failure and hypertension.

Peritoneal dialysis was difficult for Kydd and there was no haemodialysis



**The first nephrologist in Malaysia Dr Satwant Singh Gill**

treatment in Malaysian then.

Money was raised and the US embassy agreed to fly in the Drake Willock (haemodialysis) machine from Oregon, Portland.

Kydd underwent the first haemodialysis in Malaysia in early 1967. But Kydd developed severe hypertension and died. Dr Gill, one of the founder members of the National Kidney Foundation which today runs 20 haemodialysis centres in the country, said haemodialysis was available in a few government hospitals by 1980 where priority was for government servants.

In 1985, a few patients who travelled to Singapore for haemodialysis treatment, met up with Dr Gill and it led to him opening the first private centre at the Pantai Medical Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

# Now is the time to promote transplants

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Kidney (renal) transplants have been steadily dropping.

The poor response by Malaysians to donate the organs of their brain-dead relatives is the cause of the drop, said the 14th report of the Malaysian Dialysis and Transplant Registry 2006.

The report talks of moves to revitalise transplants, including the formulation of a National Organ and Tissue Transplantation policy.

The proposed setting up of a transplant unit in the Health Ministry would catalyse the transplant process and the creation of a budget specific for transplants.

Datuk Dr Rozina Ghazalli and Datuk Dr Zaki Morad Mohd Zaher, the chairperson and co-chairperson of the registry, called on nephrologists to play a more active role to promote transplants.

They said the clampdown by Chinese authorities on commercial cadaveric transplants in hospitals in China should be taken as an opportunity to promote kidney transplants.

According to the registry, there are now almost 15,000 people on dialysis.

Taking into account all those who underwent transplants

## DROP IN KIDNEY TRANSPLANTS

**189**

in 2004

**161**

in 2005

**126**

in 2006

before 1997 and now, there were 1,725 functioning transplants until December last year.

The number of deaths of dialysis patients last year was 1,575 while 164 died while on continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis (CAPD).

States with the highest number of people on dialysis treatment were Penang, Malacca, Johor, Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Kuala Lumpur.

The nation has 412 haemodialysis centres and 31 CAPD centres for dialysis.

The Health Ministry provided dialysis to 33.7 per cent of the patients in the country, NGOs 31.1 per cent and the private sector 32.8 per cent.