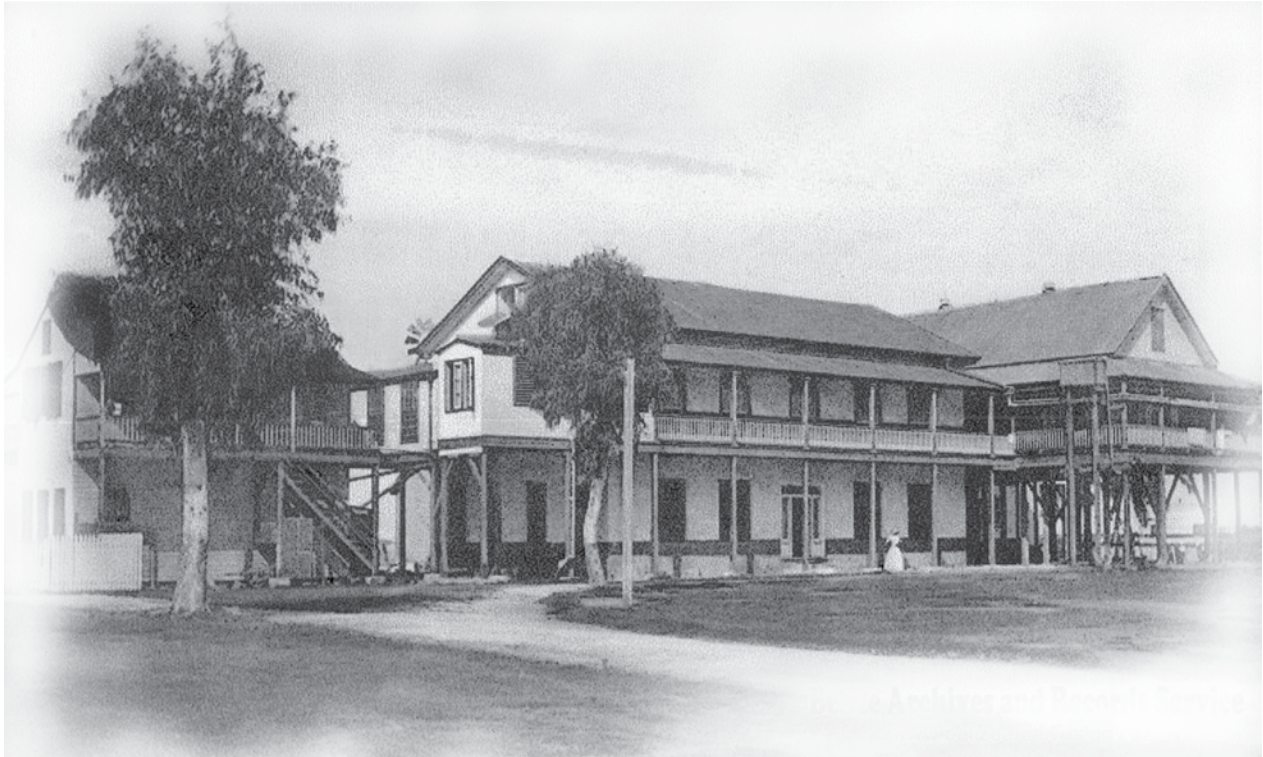


# *An Abbreviated History of the* **Belize Medical and Dental Association**



Public Hospital, Belize. Belize archives and records service

The Belize Medical and Dental Association (BMDA) was formed in 1964 (the year in which Belize attained Internal Self-Government) at a meeting of a small group of registered medical practitioners and dentists held at the home of the late Dr. Salvador Awe, a dentist with many years of experience, in Belize City. Dr. Awe was elected the first President of the Association and, of those then present, Dr. Manuel Cabrera remains in Belize today. The objectives of the Association were the maintenance of sound professional medical and dental practice and the professional development of its members, both for the ultimate benefit of the patients whom the professions served.

In the latter years of the 1960s, the late Dr. John Price became the first medical practitioner to be president of the Association and continued to be through most of the following decade (and for a while in the mid 1980s). It was through Dr. Price's unfaltering efforts that the Association continued to function, meetings being held in the compound of the ("old") Belize City Hospital, first in the Nurses' Recreation Room and subsequently in the Medical Library.

Up to this time, the Association had functioned as a "gentleman's club", albeit with informal rules and regulations. In 1981 (the year of Belize's Independence) during the presidency of Dr. Amin Hegar, the Association was placed on a formal legal footing when it was registered as a company with a limited liability.

In the early years, the Association's Continuing Medical Education (CME) activities consisted mainly of lectures and presentations from members and visitors at the Association's monthly meetings. In 1982, however, through the efforts of the then president Dr. Arturo Gamero, a two day CME program, the first of its kind, was held, subsequently becoming an annual event and giving rise to our yearly Medical Congress. The programs of these events have featured participation by visiting specialists from the United States, Mexico, Central and South America, and more recently from Europe. The standards of the

events have continued to rise and this year's program bears testimony to this. One offshoot of said visitor involvement was that, following the participation in 1992 during the presidency of Dr Cardo Martinez (and largely through his efforts) of medical staff from Tulane University School of Medicine, arrangements were made for several members of the Association to pursue short-term fellowships at that institution.

As part of the improvement in the standard of medical and dental practice, the Association has participated in the registration process of those entering the professions. The Association, in the early 1980's, collaborated closely with the Ministry of Health (MOH) in effecting a significant change in the medical registration process which came into effect in 1982, whereby the Medical Registration Board which had included members who were not necessarily of either profession was replaced by the Medical Council of Belize (MCB) which was comprised of five members drawn from both professions, two of whom were appointed on the advice of the BMDA. Mr. John Waight F.R.C.S.Ed, immediate past president of the Association and former Chairman of the Registration Board, became the first Chairman of the MCB. Further amendments to the Medical Practitioners' Registration Act including an increase in the composition of the Council to six members were effected on the advice of the Association in 1992, when Dr. Victor Lizarraga was president. In the year 2000, during the presidency of Dr. Giovanni Solórzano, the Association again conducted a further extensive review of the Act with legal assistance funded by the International Development Bank. The revision is at present being studied by the Ministry prior to enacting the proposed changes.

In pursuit of the goal of maintaining the standards of practice of the professions, the Association sought to develop a code of ethics for its members. This was some time in the making and involved the review of similar codes of other medical and dental associations in the region . Finally, at the Annual Congress held in the year 2007, when Dr, Marta Habet, was president, (the first lady member to hold said office), the Code of Ethics of the Association was presented and formally adopted.

The matter of acquiring a venue for holding the Association's meeting was also another long term project as the Association's monthly meetings were for the most part held on the hospital's premises and, when finances permitted, at rented locations including the Belize Institute of Management and hotels in Belize City. After a long search and repeated applications to various arms of Government, the Association in 2008 during the presidency of Dr. Silvio Correa, acquired a property on the Western Highway for the construction of the Association's headquarters, which is currently under development.

Throughout the half century of its existence, the Association had steadfastly held to its goal of serving the people of Belize by maintaining the standards of medical and dental practice and promoting the professional development of its members. In so doing it continues to observe the principles so well embodied in the Hippocratic Oath which has been and continues to be the guiding light of our professions.

“While I keep this Oath unviolated, may it be granted to me to enjoy life , and the Practice of the Art respected by all men in all times; but, should I trespass and violate this Oath, may the reverse be my lot”, Hippocrates circa 400B.C.

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