

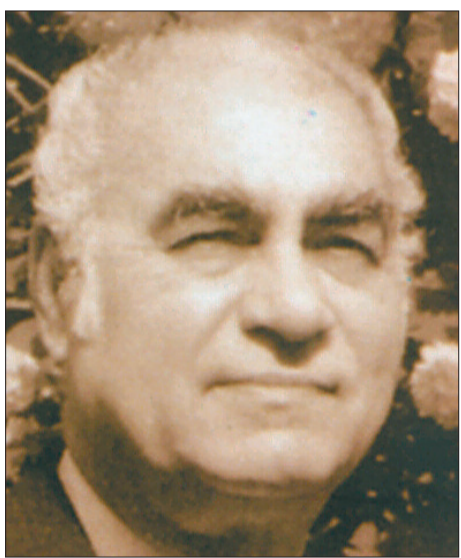


“I understood my husband’s love for the Qatari people. He felt that they were sincere, straightforward and proud of their Arab heritage and great history. Hence, this book which he intended to write himself.”

— Dr Fay Gotting



Window on Qatar’s medical past



Dr Alwyn Gotting

LANI ROSE R DIZON

DOHA *Healing Hands of Qatar*, a book written by Dr Fay Gotting 13 years ago as a tribute to her husband late Dr Alwyn Gotting, continues to give new insights to the people seeking to know more about Qatar’s medical history. The book was first published here in 1996 followed by publication of its Arabic version. Currently in its second edition, the English version of *Healing Hands of Qatar* has already sold about 1,000 copies and the Arabic version about 400 copies and counting.

In an interview with *Qatar Tribune*, Dr Gotting said that she’s currently in talks with a university in Doha, which was keen to use the book as a workbook for its students. “One of the universities has asked me if I could sell them enough books to introduce it as a course book for their faculty. They’re quite impressed with the details,” she added.

Healing Hands of Qatar was primarily written as a woman’s tribute to her late husband and his 36 years of service to the Qatari government. Dr Fay Gotting said that it was also her husband, the late Dr Alwyn Gotting, who first encouraged her to write on the history of medicine in Qatar. “Held dear by one and all for his qualities of head and heart, Dr Alwyn had worked in Qatar for 36 years, and even the younger generation says, ‘our dear friend’ while referring to him. He won’t be forgotten,” she added.

Her conversations with people about the late Dr Gotting show how much she admired her husband, and would testify to the fact that she had been her husband’s greatest supporter. In her book, she even called Dr Gotting as the ideal person to be considered as the pioneer of medical services in Qatar.

She said, “He was one of the first British doctors in Qatar employed by the government. He worked on at the old hospital (Sheikh Ali) long after the other doctors were transferred to the new Rumeilah Hospital. Though a specialist of tuberculosis, he was also called upon to practise obstetrics, psychiatry or any other speciality when no one else was available; this included doing the job of a veterinary surgeon too.”

Dr Gotting also said, “He wrote a request to the ‘Times’ newspaper in London and had good response coming from around the world to help rescue the declining population of Oryx from extinction. He was ever ready to offer his help wherever it was needed.”

It was in 1972 that late Dr Alwyn Gotting was appointed the first Director in the Ministry of Public Health. His wife said, “I understood his love for the Qatari people. He understood them to be sincere, straightforward and proud of their Arab heritage and great history. Hence this book, which he intended to write himself.”

Healing Hands of Qatar tells the readers about the history of health care and medicine in Qatar based as it’s on the research of Dr Alwyn Gotting and Dr Fay Gotting’s, which she presented to the Glasgow University to get her degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arabic and Islamic Studies.

In the book, Dr Fay Gotting has traced the evolution of health care in Qatar right from early days to the establishment of Islam and up to the discovery of oil in 1939, particularly



Medicinal plants found in Qatar

GLIMPSES FROM THE PAST



The Hamad Hospital (top) and (above) dignitaries at its inauguration.



The first hospital on seashore (Sheikh Ali’s).



Rumeilah hospital, as seen from above.

in the last few decades during which Qatar’s health and medicare services have grown to match those available in any of the Arabian Gulf countries, even the world. Also, a certain chapter in the book titled ‘Reflections of the

Pioneers’ also tells the readers about the exciting times and stories of the early days of health care in Qatar, based on Dr Gotting’s conversations with some of the pioneers in the field of health care in Doha.

The book features several chapters dealing with the traditional medicines and medicinal plants in Qatar. Dr Fay Gotting said, “The Qataris will find the section on herbal medicine to be familiar because their grandmothers taught them early all about it. Every Qatari woman has herbs in her kitchen which they use at home. What does not grow in Qatar, they import from Iran.”

Dr Gotting went on to tell about the stores in Souq Waqif currently selling medicinal herbs and traditional medicines to residents here. She said, “The owners are usually Qatari traditional healers. Traditional and herbal medicines are still in use here. There are women who can turn around unborn babies, if they’re in a wrong position in their mothers’ wombs. There are women who will massage the tonsils with pomegranate to treat throat infections, so you don’t have to use antibiotics. There are procedures where metal instruments are heated up in fire and put to strategic points on the body of a patient to cure him. I’ve spoken to several people who swear by the effectiveness of this traditional healing method.”

Dr Fay also said that while traditional medicines continued to be in use, traditional healers called *Hakim* were still found in Doha. She said, “A *hakim*, which is really close to our definition of doctor, doesn’t have a certified degree from a recognised university. His knowledge of diseases and medicines and treatment skills are handed down by oral tradition, from father to son and mother to daughter. Such a system is not unique to Qatar and Arabs as every civilisation has developed its own indigenous system of healing.”

Dr Fay Gotting came to Qatar in 1979 with qualifications in midwifery and psychiatry. She filled the nursing post as Sister-in-Charge at the ICU at Rumeilah Hospital. Several months later, she was transferred to the Polyclinic as an administrative sister, where she established the medical and paediatric consultants’ outpatients. Dr Gotting also organised the walk-in-clinic at the Primary Health Department. She was later appointed to the medical commission, where she developed a health screening programme for expatriates, and introduced the system of medical records, x-ray and laboratory data being stored on computers. At Hamad Hospital, she established an equipment catalogue library for the training of Qatari purchasing officers.

Speaking about the nursing field in Qatar, she said, “There’s a history of nursing among the Muslims. It goes back a long way, but it was a bit slow to catch on here because of cultural ideas. They had male nursing school, but they wanted Qatari nurses to be involved. Earlier, it’s very difficult to get them to take a profession other than teaching and their families to allow them into the profession. But now they are joining the rest of the world. They are taking bachelors and master degrees in nursing, and there are several working in Hamad Hospital with PhD.”

Healing Hands of Qatar, as described by one biographer “proves that transforming suffering and pain into energy and value creation can empower a generation to aspire to use their lives to make a difference in society.”