

## HISTORY OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AND ITS HEALTH SYSTEM

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago forms the two southernmost islands of the archipelago known as the Lesser Antilles. The combined area of both islands is just under 2,000 square miles, and the population is 1.3 million (last estimated in 1995).

The population is ethnically diverse with peoples of African (45%) East Indian (45%) and European and Chinese (10%) descents. There are also varied religious representations consisting of Roman Catholics (40%) Anglicans (10%) Presbyterians (4%) Hindus (30%) Muslims (5%) and other Christian denominations (10%). The majority of the population live in the industrial West coast and along "the East-West Corridor" in the Northern part of Trinidad.

The major portion of obstetric and gynaecological services offered to the public, comes from the Port of Spain General Hospital (900 beds), the San-Fernando General Hospital (650 beds) and Mount Hope Women's Hospital (150 beds). Health Services are provided free of charge at all these public health institutions. In addition there are 100 peripheral health centres and 7 district hospitals which deal with the provision of antenatal care for low risk pregnancies. Only uncomplicated deliveries are performed at district hospitals. Other aspects of health care are provided by the Caura Chest Hospital (150 beds), the St. Ann's Psychiatric Hospital (300 beds) and the St. James Medical Complex which comprises a Geriatric Hospital and the National Radiotherapy Centre.

The Mount Hope Women's Hospital was built in 1980 by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in collaboration with the World Health Organization. It is the largest women's hospital in the Caribbean and is eventually to become the Obstetrics and Gynaecology department of the Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex which has already been built but is yet to be fully commissioned. This Complex incorporates a comprehensive teaching hospital, whose undergraduate medical school has already opened its doors as the Faculty of Medical Sciences of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus.

At present the Mt. Hope Women's Hospital has a staff of doctors who run the Obstetric, Gynaecological, Anaesthetic and Neonatal Departments. There are 10 members and 4 Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, and 1 Doctor of Medicine in Obstetrics and Gynaecology from the University of the West Indies. The Staff is headed by Professor S. Roopnarinesingh FRCOG, who is also senior lecturer and Dean to the Medical Faculty of the University of the West Indies. There are also departments of Radiology/Ultrasonography and of Physiotherapy. The hospital also has its independent laboratory facilities and two major operating theatres.

Like many Third World countries, Trinidad and Tobago suffers tremendous drain of its medical personnel, particularly nurses, to First World countries, predominantly United States and United Kingdom. Because of the recent downturn of the economy in Trinidad this problem has become critical in the last few months.

#### **HEALTH CARE AT MOUNT HOPE WOMEN'S HOSPITAL**

The hospital has a capacity of 150 beds of which 110 are adult and 40 are neonatal. The beds are distributed as follows: