A Service for which we can Feel Proud

by Janet Jagan

Historically, the People’s Progressive Party has always put improving health care as a priority. Whenever the PPP has been in government, it has spent time, money and devotion to this aim. As far back as the PPP’s 1957-61 government, limited as it was during the colonial period, impressive strides were made in the field of health. The PPP government with the help of the United Nations made significant advances in control and prevention of malaria and filaria, in the case of malaria, using medicated salt and insecticidal spraying. It began an intensive anti-typhoid scheme, inoculating some 70,000 school children and initiated an anti-polio campaign which required three separate dosages of the vaccine.

The PPP government spread health services to the rural areas by providing many health centres and cottage hospitals. It improved the Public Hospital, introducing an Ear, Nose and Throat department, new surgical theatres, a blood bank and improvements in laboratory services. So, as far back as the 1950s – 50 years ago, the PPP was fulfilling its mandate to bring better services to the Guyanese people. Those were pioneering efforts, later improved and extended when the PPP came into office in 1992.

The PPP’s Programme “For A Democratic and Prosperous Guyana,” in simple terms, lays out the Party’s fundamental aim in the field of health care: “As a Party which cares for the people, the PPP pays great attention to the provision of adequate and efficient health care nation wide. The necessary infrastructure must be provided centrally and in all communities to ensure that everyone has access at least to primary health care. Medical personnel at all levels must be trained to provide essential and vital services. Steps must also be taken to facilitate higher levels of health services to treat with specialized needs.”

In its most recent election manifesto – that of 2006 – the PPP discussed what it had achieved in health services, pointing out that the health sector in 1991 was allotted the sum of $703M (1.7% of the budget) whereas by 2006 the amount spent on health was $8B (9% of the budget). Already $218M has been spent to rebuild the physical infrastructure that was grossly neglected by the PNC Government (1968-92). The Health Ministry has improved access to more than 325 health facilities now available around the country. Our immunization rates are more than 90%, compared to 65% in 1991.

At the Georgetown Public Hospital, at the dispensary, there is a huge sign that states that all medications are free. Dental care is now not only available at the Cheddi Jagan Dental Clinic in Georgetown, but is spreading to the towns and villages, as is the provision of eyeglasses. Hundreds of persons in need of eye surgery are provided with first class treatment in Cuba. And Cuba is also providing Guyanese students with the opportunity to receive education to become doctors. And in the meantime, Cuban doctors are sent to Guyana to help with the shortfall.

Guyana’s Health Ministry is not projecting the impression that every problem in health care has been solved. It is realistic and focuses, first on what is absolutely essential to basic health care, recognizing financial, personnel and other problems. However, realistically, the health care system provides good and free essential health care to the majority of Guyanese, far superior to that which exists in some other countries. The devotion, skills and will to succeed in the major task of bringing good and reliable health care to all Guyanese is something for which each and every Guyanese can be proud.