

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 the prevention of malaria and filaria, in the case of malaria, using medicated salt and intensive 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 improvement in laboratory services. So, as far back as the 1950's - 50 years ago, the PPP was fulfilling its mandate to bring better services to the Guyanese people. These were pioneering ef-

forts, 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 nec-

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 \$21B 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.

essary 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 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 \$21B 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.

Very important to health assessment are the death rates for infants and for mothers giving birth. In 1991 the Infant Mortality Rate was between 78-120 per 1000 births and this has now improved to 25-48 per 1000 - a spectacular reduction. Even in the world's wealthiest country, the USA,

its world rating has dropped to 29. Women can now give birth more safely and Guyana's maternal mortality rate is about 11 per 10,000, much lower than 34 deaths per 10,000 in 1991.

Guyana has performed at the highest level in the control and prevention of malaria, tuberculosis and HIV. The immunization programme covers over 95% of all children, bringing Guy-

ana the WHO gold medal for immunization. Guyana's Health Minister Dr Leslie Ramsammy has noted that "Guyana is one of the countries that has adapted and embraced the Primary Health Care revolution and is one of the countries that can say we have attained the goals." For example, antenatal services are available across the nation with almost 400 health institutions, where health care can be assessed. This includes much



Janet Jagan

higher access to health care for our Amerindian population than ever before.

Another example of the widespread availability of health care in the one year report on the functioning of the Diamond Diagnostic Centre which has recorded the treatment of 75,000 patients to date!

Compare the achievements in health care in our small country with the number one developed country of the world, the USA. Reports in December last year say that more than 40 million Americans cannot afford adequate health care and go without drugs, eye glasses or dental treatment. This, according to a federal report, shows that access to health care is still a major issue in that country. In fact, Democratic candidate for the presidency, Senator Barack Obama, has made the provision of health care to all Americans one of the major issues of his campaign.

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 eye glasses. 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 shortage.

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.