

In 1847 the Auckland Hospital was founded and administered by the General Government of New Zealand. The internal management of the institution was placed in the hands of a medical officer appointed by the Governor as Colonial Surgeon at a salary fixed by the Legislative Council. All expenses incurred in the administration of the institution were met out of general revenue, with the exception of a small rental derived from endowments.

It is interesting to note that during 1848, 158 Maori patients, coming from places as far distant as Rotorua, Tauranga, and Hokianga, were nursed side by side with Europeans. The free dispensary at Auckland was much appreciated, especially by the Maoris, whose ills to a great extent did not warrant admission to the wards. Returns for this year show that 376 outdoor Native patients were treated. These early results were very gratifying to Governor Grey, who, writing on the subject, said: "Notwithstanding the doubts of some as to the practicability of the plan of mixing Natives and Europeans in the same wards, it cannot be denied that it has been carried out as certified by the medical officers with perfect and satisfactory results."

The present-day citizen of Christchurch, when viewing the imposing block of buildings comprising the Christchurch Hospital, finds it rather difficult to imagine how the infant city, during the first ten or twelve years of its existence, managed to do without such an essential institution. True, the population was small and, for a time, Lyttelton was of greater importance. But by 1st March, 1851, twelve hundred persons had arrived by the ships that constituted the first expedition under the Canterbury Association, and each month saw an increasing number of immigrants arriving. Evidence of the greater importance of Lyttelton in the early years of the settlement is given by the fact that the seaport actually possessed the first hospital in the province. Strange as it appears to present-day readers, patients were conveyed from Christchurch to the Lyttelton Hospital; at any rate, an entry dated 1853 has been found setting out that a Mr. Wheeler received the sum of "£2 for conveying a sick man from Christchurch to the Lyttelton Hospital."

It is recorded that the first Dunedin Hospital was erected in 1851 on ground in the Octagon. An early writer states that, like the gaol of that city, it was ahead of its time, as for over two years not one of its beds was occupied. It was turned to a use never dreamed of. Three insane persons had to be cared for, and so the first hospital in Dunedin became the first asylum.

With the discovery of the goldfields in 1861 and the influx of immigrants the demand for hospital accommodation increased. It is related that the strain became severe, and during the next few years building after building was erected and beds totalling 210 were provided.

In 1875 the Otago Medical School began its classes, and this gave Dunedin Hospital a position of prominence and unique importance amongst hospitals of the Dominion.

The final and effectual grant of the constitutional system of Government was established by the Act of 30th June, 1852, which subdivided the colony into six provinces—Auckland, Taranaki, Wellington, Nelson, Canterbury, and Otago. The Constitution was promulgated on 6th September, 1853.

The control of hospitals was not vested in the Provincial Councils until 1854, when the General Government passed the Public Reserves Act, transferring hospital endowments to a Board of Commissioners.

In 1856, doubts having arisen as to the validity and effect of the three Crown grants, the Provincial Government passed the Validating Act whereby the Superintendent of the Province of Auckland assumed the control and management of both the hospital and its endowments.

That the Christchurch Hospital did not take actual form till 1862 through any lack of foresight is abundantly clear.

In Auckland a Sick and Destitute Act was passed, and came into operation on 3rd July, 1868. The electoral districts of Auckland constituted the twenty-eight districts for the purpose of the Act, and all male residents of twenty-one years or over were rated 10s. annually. Maoris were exempt, and Europeans unable to pay were granted exemption by a Justice or a member of the Council. Money collected under this Act was paid into the Provincial Treasury as a separate account, called the "Sick and Destitute Fund."

The Act for the abolition of the provinces was passed on 12th October, 1875, but it was not until 1st November, 1876, that the provincial institutions came under the control of the General Government, and this meant a change in the administration of the hospital.

On 1st November, 1876, the General Government took over the control of the hospitals in New Zealand.

During the next few years the General Government found itself the last appeal of all impecunious and embarrassed bodies concerned in the management of charitable institutions. Demands were made for financial aid such as could not in many instances be well refused, but which were still a constant source of irritation to those in charge of the Treasury. The demands naturally increased as grants made in any one direction impressed other committees with the comparative ease of an appeal to Government in contradistinction to the difficulty of procuring funds through local voluntary subscriptions. So many local interests were involved that the task of legislating to provide adequately, and yet economically, for hospital maintenance was not easy.

The first attempt to put the hospitals under districts supported by the contributions of local bodies instead of leaving them in the hands of voluntary subscribers and the central government appears in sections 24 to 27 of the Abolition of the Province Financial Arrangements Bill, brought down by Sir Julius Vogel in 1876, to make provision for carrying on the services of the provinces when abolition took place on 29th September of that year. This Bill was, however, withdrawn after its first reading following on Sir Julius Vogel's resignation from the premiership to take up the position of Agent-General in London.