

inspiring **MIND**

HOPE FLOATS

DR. LIE DHARMAWAN HAS ESTABLISHED THE NATION'S FIRST PRIVATE FLOATING HOSPITAL TO BRING FREE QUALITY MEDICAL CARE TO REMOTE COMMUNITIES.

WORDS NATASHA ISHAK





Healthcare is expensive except for the most affluent of citizens. For low-income families, it is often a luxury beyond their means. Dr. Lie Dharmawan, founder of Indonesian NGO doctorShare and head of surgery at Husada Hospital in Central Jakarta, is among those trying to change that inequality.

DoctorShare was conceived in November 2009 by Dr. Lie, 68, and several colleagues to serve the disadvantaged. The NGO runs a number of programs, but the most famous is the Dr. Lie Dharmawan Floating Hospital – the first privately run hospital of its kind in the country.

Dr. Lie grew up in a family that faced many hardships. His single mother raised him and seven other siblings in Padang, West Sumatra, during the late 1940s, when the fledgling nation was still trying to free itself from Dutch colonial rule. A sister of his died from diarrhea due to the unsanitary conditions at an evacuation camp.

Her death was entirely preventable, he says, if only the proper medical care was available.

Her loss fueled his interest in becoming a doctor, and taking care of the needs of all citizens. He began performing make-believe operations on other members of his family in preparation.

“I always knew I wanted to be a doctor,” says Dr. Lie, a modest man who speaks with conviction. “I had always been fascinated with curing people. But I believe the loss of my sister was a big trigger in me becoming a doctor.”

The idea for the floating hospital came after an encounter with a mother and her ill son during the NGO programs operating around the Kei islands, located in southeastern Maluku province.

The mother had traveled three days and two nights from a neighboring island to seek medical help for her child, who was suffering from severe abdominal pain.

Fortunately, the team was promptly able to operate

and the boy survived. Just an hour or two later, and he probably would have succumbed to his illness.

It inspired Dr. Lie to ensure rural patients could receive treatment in time. A floating hospital seemed the perfect solution in this sprawling archipelagic nation.

SETTING SAIL

Dr. Lie, who earned his degree from Free University of Berlin, faced plenty of challenges at the outset. The father of three found it a challenge to seek support for his idea at the beginning. People around him did not think a private floating hospital was plausible (the Navy provides medical and dental services in the archipelago).

The biggest problem of all was finding a boat to accommodate the bulky medical equipment but that was also able to dock at the ports and coastlines of the small islands.

From idea to conception, it took four years for the

floating hospital to be completed. The fully functioning hospital braves the seas atop a 23.5 x 6.55 meter two-story reconstructed Phinisi boat. It is equipped with complete medical facilities, including an x-ray room, electrocardiogram (ECG), ultra sonography (USG), laboratory, operating room and eight bunks for patients in treatment.

The ambitious project, running into billions of rupiah,

was funded through donations and Dr. Lie's own money.

"We have never done the precise accounting but it has cost a fortune," he says.

The floating hospital, launched in March 2013, covers a five-hour route from Pantai Mutiara harbor in Jakarta to Panggang island in Thousand Islands regency. More than 12,000 coastal residents

have received treatment in the past year – all the services are completely free.

Dr. Lie's philanthropic work both locally and abroad (earlier this year he assisted victims of the Haiyan cyclone in the Philippines) speak for itself.

For him, the project is more than part of his duties. It is a calling.

The devout Catholic believes in the grace of a higher power, and it has kept him going through rough times.

"My faith is my source of inspiration, strength and, most importantly, the source of my compassion for other human beings. That is what pushed me through it all and that is what reassured me the dream would someday be a reality," Dr. Lie says.

During the time of writing, the mobile hospital had set sail on a new route through Lombok, Sulawesi, then on to Raja Ampat, Papua – its farthest point yet.

"What we are doing is providing the assistance we can to better the lives of people who are unable to receive the help they need. But that does not mean we can resolve the situation on our own, nor do we wish to make up for what should be a government concern," he says fervently.

"Statistics show that 160,000 medical units are needed across the country, yet there are only about 60,000 currently running and a large portion of that is on the west coast. So you see, we are merely a temporary solution for the crisis at hand.

"But we do hope that what we are doing can act as a catalyst for others to do more."

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