

## Editorial

### 20 years German-Indonesian Medical Association (GIMA) / Deutsch-Indonesische Gesellschaft für Medizin (DIGM e.V.)

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In summer 1996, exactly 20 years ago medical doctors from Germany and Indonesia gathered to cooperate and strengthen the exchange of medical knowledge for the sake of either country. There was an essential historical background: after independence Indonesia's first President had called about 500 German medical doctors and pharmacists to his country to help building up basic medical supply and the public health system. Moreover, through the breakup of the relationship with the former colonial Netherlands ten thousands of Indonesian students of the first postwar generation registered at German universities among them later reformer President Habibie, who set the democratic fundamentals in Indonesia in 1998/1999. In his time, Prof. Habibie was amongst the largest group of Indonesian students in Germany, the engineers followed by medical students, in the second place. In other words, there was a good background of medical contacts existing in either direction which needed stimulation.

The latter came from the then German Ambassador in Jakarta, Dr. jJur. Heinrich Seemann<sup>1</sup> and resulted in the foundation of the German-Indonesian Medical Association (DIGM) by five German and two Indonesian physicians on June 21, 1996. Founding President was Prof. Dr. Hans-Dieter Bundschu, Bad Mergentheim. Among the members of "Alumni Jerman", an association of Indonesian graduates from German universities was the first President of the Indonesian Section, Dr. H.A. Napitupulu.

We should not forget that Germans had been well known in Indonesia for centuries and German language still was a subject at Indonesian schools in the last century. Thousands of Germans had headed to former "Netherlands Indie" as adventurers, merchants, missionaries, engineers, scientists, painters, and last but not least,

physicians and pharmacists. The latter group of health professions was always needed and brought many famous researchers and explorers into the formerly unknown tropical country: Georg Rumphius (1627–1702), indeed the first modern scientist in the country and Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn (1809–1863), whom the Encyclopedia Britannica called "Humboldt of Java". Caspar Georg Karl Reinwardt (1773–1854), who founded one of the World's most famous botanical gardens, and last but not least, Adolf Bastian (1826–1905), the founder of the Ethnological Museums in Berlin. His scientific writings about the country propagated successfully the name "Indonesia", which is composed of "Indo" and the Greek word for "island", νῆσος (nisos), which appears related to the Indonesian word "nusa".<sup>2</sup>

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is the aim of DIGM to merge and revive old and new relationships in the medical field strengthening the cooperation of nowadays two modern countries. Natural connections for such initiatives are already existing personal contacts. DIGM intends to gain German University Teaching Hospitals to provide as many work places as possible for young visiting Indonesian physicians and to invite them to Germany for their formal and informal professional training, specialization, and upgrading. In the opposite direction, DIGM wants to convince young German medical professionals that it is a satisfying task to work for a while in an Indonesian hospital in order to learn about different medical and public health systems and to gain experience especially in the intervention of transmitted diseases in tropical countries.

Starting from 1997, DIGM has regularly initiated workshops, seminars and congresses mainly in Jakarta or in its vicinity covering topics of Traumatology, the Future of Medicine, Neurosurgery, Pediatrics, Cardiovascular Diseases,

Geriatrics, and Biogenetics. Furthermore, there are regular contacts between several German Hospitals and their corresponding institutions in Indonesia. The promising exchange of visiting physicians involved mainly university teaching hospitals in Bad Oeynhausen, Muenster, Munich-Bogenhausen, Kiel, Frankfurt am Main, and Bad Mergentheim. Unfortunately, there were also years of disappointment; the establishment of a Biomedical Institute or a German Hospital in Indonesia did not succeed, in spite of tremendous national and international efforts and the signature of MOUs, e.g., the intended permanent cooperation with RSPP in Jakarta or with Zainoel Abidin Hospital in Banda Aceh, which was re-established after the tsunami with financial support from Germany. Mutual acknowledgement of visiting physicians was impeded by increasing bureaucratic hurdles for adaptation and by the lack of recognition of diplomas and qualifications, and by restrictions of work permits.

From 2008 to 2014, DIGM was successfully reactivated and restructured by its President and the executive board both in Germany and Indonesia with a total of now more than 300 members, most of them in Indonesia. During last years, annual meetings of the DIGM board

members were mostly combined with scientific seminars, alternately organized in Indonesia and Germany, often under the auspices of the respective ambassadors. The original DIGM Scientific Journal could be merged with the Medical Journal of Indonesia, which is now the official publication medium, continuously.

We hope that DIGM's current executive board under its President Prof. Dr. J. Haier will bring new orientations and further stabilization by facilitating communication, introducing online newsletters, webinars, and internet meetings for the future sake of the association. On the occasion of the association's 20-year jubilee its successful route should be consequently continued aiming to reduce bureaucratic hurdles, to establish new stable networks and to motivate enthusiastically old and new members - Best wishes for success and good luck to the German-Indonesian Medical Association.

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pISSN: 0853-1773 • eISSN: 2252-8083 • <http://dx.doi.org/10.13181/mji.v25i2.1484> • Med J Indones. 2016;25:67-8

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