

HOSPITAL 50 YEARS YOUNG

Last year the world heard the name Coledale after a shark mauled a boy on Coledale beach and doctors at Coledale Hospital saved his life.

Drama and terror catch the fleeting headlines, but the doctors and nurses of Coledale have been saving lives now for 50 years.

This week the hospital and the people it helps called a pause to take strength from the past as the Cottage Hospital launched out on another 50 years of endeavour.

The miners, pioneers in so many advances, were the first to realise the need for a Cottage Hospital in an area so close to the mines.

The agitation began in 1910 and it was seven years before the then Illawarra Cottage Hospital opened.

The 'Times' of the day reported that the mine-workers of North Bulli Colliery launched the Hospital movement in July, 1910, by inviting other collieries in the area to send delegates to a meeting.

The others were from Scarborough Tunnel, South Clifton and Coalcliff.

A Dr. Dixon donated the land on which the hospital is built.

Obviously more land was needed so the committee considered an offer of a two-acre adjoining site for £50.

With commendable business cunning the committee decided to accept the offer - on condition the seller would make a donation of £10 to the building fund.

The men of North Bulli Colliery remained the building committee's most devoted supporters. They raised £214.

But by now raising money for the Hospital fund was an established work in the district. The cash trickled in from concerts and bazaars and even race meetings.

Then - crisis, Dr. Willis of the Board of Health reported strongly against the site. The Chief Secretary of the day, Mr. Flowers, came down to decide for himself.

He tramped the site, looked at other possibilities and announced his findings at a Bazaar being held that day to raise money for the Hospital - there was not a

better site for a Hospital in N.S.W.

He promised Coledale a hospital that would meet its needs for 30 years. Chief Secretary Flowers was a man of his word. A hospital building was completed and handed over to the committee in October, 1915.

The Government paid £5000 of the £7,000 cost. The local fund paid off another £1100.

The bill had to be paid off and furniture and equipment bought before the Illawarra Cottage Hospital opened 50 years ago tomorrow. March 17, 1917.

It had 15 beds and four cots. By 1930 it had grown to a 25 - bed hospital and by 1933 it had 41 beds.

There was little growth for 20 years until the Dr. L. Fetherstone Memorial Ward opened and extensions to the male ward increased the number of beds to 54.

Thirty years ago it treated 440 patients in a year. Patients stayed an average of 28.7 days.

Today it treats 1200 patients a year; now the average stay is down to 7.5 days.

In its early days it had a budget of about \$8000 a year; today its income is over half a million dollars.

Since 1961 it has been pounding the Hospitals' Commission with requests that it arrange a master plan along which future improvements can develop.

Today the Board is swamped with the practical, and financial problems of air conditioning the operation theatre; building a car parking area, finding a new nurses' home, renovating the obstetric block service area, fitting out a new doctors' change room and - right down to earth - finding the cash to buy a stand-by boiler.

The Chairman of the Board, Mr. F. L. Nicholls, reflected yesterday on all that has happened.

"Medicine, public health, nursing, food preparation, business administration - all are changing almost daily, yet it is the duty of the Board to make sure Coledale keeps up with modern trends and standards.

"I assure you that the Board is dedicated to ensuring that the Hospital will obtain the improvements which fall necessary from time to time.

South Coast Times, 16.3.66