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Honorary degree for Dr Siti Hasmah

PETALING JAYA, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali was today conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Medicine by the International Medical University at its 17th convocation.

In her acceptance speech, the Prime Minister's wife related her experience studying medicine.

"Studying medicine after World War II was different than it is now. There were only 10 girls of the 75 students admitted to the King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore. I was the only Malay girl.

"I relied on the support of my family and friends, especially a particular student from Kedah," she added, referring to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who studied at the same college. They both graduated from the University of Malaya in Singapore.

Dr Siti Hasmah thanked IMU for the honour which, she said, was totally unexpected. "Never in my wildest dreams did I expect to receive such an honour."

The award was presented by IMU chancellor Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail.

Zahir said Dr Siti Hasmah had kept true to her training as a doctor to serve mankind. "The degree is in recognition of her contributions to society, particularly in the areas of public health, women's issues, drug abuse control and adult literacy," he said.

Dr Siti Hasmah created history in north Kedah by becoming the first woman medical officer in 1963 and the first woman medical officer for Maternal and Child Health in the Department of Health.

After moving to Kuala Lumpur in 1974, she trained nurses while serving as health officer in the Division of Maternal and Child Health at the Institute of Public Health. Her training materials and manuals are still being used today.

She has held numerous positions in non-governmental organisations, including president of the Malaysian Girl Guides Association, the Malaysian Medical Association and the Association for the Rehabilitation of Handicapped Children.

Forty-nine graduates also received the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, MBBS (IMU) from Zahir today.

The Dr John Joseph Bosco Memorial Gold Medal was awarded to Chan Mei Yan, 24. The Dr Saidi Hashim Memorial Gold Medal went to Chee Jia Lian, who will leave for the University of Melbourne.

Two families among those present had reason to celebrate twice as much. Twins Nurzaihana and Nurzaihane Zulkefly, 24, obtained MBBS (IMU) while sisters Shalina and Shameera Navaratnam graduated with advanced diplomas.