

## 1. BACKGROUND

Mexican medicine dates back to the prehispanic period, when "true" doctors (tlamatimini), which we would now call scientific, coexisted with witch doctors (nahualli) and empirical experts in the use of medicinal herbs for curative purposes. With the Spanish colony, the Spanish and mestizo population received the services of western doctors, while the vast indian population was covered by the autoctonous medicine. The first hospital established on Mexican soil was founded by Hernán Cortés shortly after his defeat of Tenochtitlan in 1534. The first hospitals were all run by monastic orders, until in 1821 the Spanish Constitution extinguished them. At that time, health services were put under government responsibility. Hospitals, as they were understood in colonial Mexico, included not only installations for curative purposes, but also shelters for the poor and abandoned and, in some cases, true hospital-villages to care for the people. With the new, post-Independence government of Benito Juárez, all goods in hands of the church were nationalized and the last church-held hospitals became state property (1859) under federal and local administration. Several Councils and Directorates were created and later disappeared to supervise hospital operations, until with the government of Porfirio Díaz, the Directorate of Public Welfare and the Superior Health Council were created under the Ministry of the Interior. The first regulations for hospitals were then passed (1877). Slowly new hospitals were built and old hospitals rebuilt and modernized using the French model. Several foreign communities also built their own hospitals, as is the case with the French Hospital (1860), the northamerican welfare created in 1868, which later joined efforts with the British to create the British hospital (1895), which in 1964 became the American-British Cowdray Hospital, and the Spanish welfare institution (1842) which built a hospital in 1876 and further moved in 1932 to the present facilities.

During the post-Revolutionary period, many changes took place in the public health sector. The Health Department was created in 1919, which in 1934 became the Public Health Department. During the presidency of Manuel Avila Camacho (1940-1946) a major hospital construction program was implemented, translating into the inauguration of 45 hospitals. In 1943 the Secretariat of Health and Welfare was created (Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia) which recently was renamed Secretariat of Health (Secretaría de Salud). The Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS) was created in 1943 as a national and mandatory public service which covers all persons bound by labor or learning contracts and members of business associations, and in 1960 the Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales para los Trabajadores del Estado (ISSSTE) was established (although its roots date back to 1925) to provide overall public health coverage to public employees (see Section 4 for more information). In 1958, there were a total of 1,132 hospitals in Mexico with 47,505 beds, in 1967 there were 4,902 hospitals with 86,151 beds, 56% in public