Doctor Ahmed Saeed Affara hailed from the Aqrabi village of Hiswah near Aden. Born in 1910 he had his pre-university education at the Keith Falconer Mission Hospital (KFMH) School in Sheikh Othman. In 1928, aged 18, his father sent him back to the Mission school to master the English language. Aden, at the time was still administered from British India, but was to become a Crown Colony under the direct rule of London in 1937. A good education and mastery of the English language was seen as an essential key to a successful career.

Four years later, in 1932, Ahmed left Aden for Scotland. He studied medicine at Edinburgh University Medical School qualifying MB,ChB in 1938. He was the first Arab from South Arabia to qualify as a physician. He went on to gain the then much needed Diplomas in Tropical Medicine (DTM&H) and Public Health (DPH). He spent his first post-qualification spell in Palestine where he practised a great deal of surgery. Here he met and married his Palestinian wife Nasra Ma'arouf, of Ramallah. Soon after the start of WWII, he returned to Aden in
1941 to take up the post of physician at the KFM Hospital in Sheikh Othman (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The KFMH c.1956. Photograph by the author.

His abilities as physician, diagnostician, general surgeon and healer soon became apparent and he attracted patients from far and wide, and from all walks of life. As a *hakim* (literally the wise one, also a term for physician and doctor/ *daktoor*) the demands on his expertise in treating adults and children involved every aspect of medicine and surgery. Part of the clinical responsibility of the KFMH which he helped to shoulder was to look after the residents of the nearby leprosy sanatorium, and the training of nurses and health care workers for upcountry clinics in the Western Aden Protectorate (WAP). In addition to his medical expertise he was well known for his generosity and hospitality. This he extended to his colleagues, subordinates and to many others alike without regard to wealth, rank or social status. He had a special affinity with fishermen, and with the ordinary, often disadvantaged folk of his neighbourhood. In his private practice he charged fees according to a patient’s ability to pay.
In 1950 he was elected chairman of the Aden Branch of the British Medical Association and served in this capacity until 1953. Meanwhile, in recognition of his services to the Sheikh Othman community he was asked to be Umdah (Provost/Mayor) of the township, a post which he held for a year.

Apart from his abilities as physician he was remembered for his warmth and humanity and for the moments of his precious time which he would typically share with friends in a local coffee house. Public appreciation of his dedicated medical work was such that the KFMH became known as Isbital Affara (Affara’s Hospital).

In 1961, after twenty exhausting years of service, he resigned his post in the KFMH and focused on his demanding private practice in Sheikh Othman. Pressures of work soon affected his health and he decided to move to Scotland, join his family in Edinburgh and to work there as a general practitioner. By 1968, aged only 57 years, he died of a heart attack.

As the first Arab from South Arabia to qualify as a physician Ahmed Saeed Affara’s life and times deserve fuller appreciation. He was a product of Western education which he fully utilised in the service of the people and land of his birth. He was very much loved and respected for his medical expertise but above all for his great humanity.

Sources:


**Oral History:**

Between 2006 and 2010 many who worked with or closely knew Dr Ahmed Affara kindly shared their fond memories.

"The author gratefully acknowledges the kind input of Dr. Affara's daughter, Mrs Salwa Jones, in reviewing this paper".

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1 The author is indebted to his friend Mr. Mohammad Hameed (Clinical Laboratory Technologist of the Bin Hameed Al-Mansourah Laboratory fame) for kindly giving me permission to use the photograph posted here.