

Matthew Hay

**Professor of Forensic Medicine, Aberdeen Medical Officer of Health and
Visionary Creator of the Aberdeen “Joint Hospitals Scheme”**



Matthew Hay is often credited as being the visionary behind the creation of the innovative “Joint Hospitals Scheme” in Aberdeen. To understand why he supported the idea of providing public health care and medical training in one location it is important to understand his background, education and work experience.

Dr Hay was born on the 27th of December 1855 at Hill Head, Slamannan in the Parish of Denny, Stirlingshire. He was the son of Matthew Hay, a Colliery owner and Elizabeth Hay nee Stirling, the daughter of a wealthy ship owner. After his secondary education at Dollar Academy he studied arts subjects for two years at Glasgow University before embarking on the study of Medicine. In 1874 after a year of studying Medicine he transferred to the University of Edinburgh where he graduated MB CM with Honours in 1878. An accomplished student he came top of his year and claimed the Ettles Scholarship awarded to the most distinguished medical graduate of the year.

Following his graduation Matthew Hay specialised in Toxicology and Pharmacology spending time training in the U.K. and overseas in Strasburg, Munich and Berlin. He became so renowned in Pharmacology that in 1884 he was offered the foundation Chair of Pharmacology at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in the United States of America. However, he chose to remain at the University of Aberdeen where he had been appointed to the Chair of Medical Logic and Jurisprudence (Forensic Medicine) only a year previously. Only 27 at the time of his appointment he was to serve as Chair for 43 years.

During his time teaching Forensic Medicine at the University of Aberdeen Hay developed an intense interest in public health and infectious diseases, even lecturing on issues such as hygiene, and in 1888 he was appointed Medical Officer of Health for the City of Aberdeen a post he was to fill until 1923. He also added to his public health role by becoming physician in charge of the City Hospital which then served as the Fever Hospital caring for patients with infectious diseases.

During his time serving as a Professor at the University of Aberdeen he gained a reputation for being a skilled lecturer, an expert witness of note in medico-legal cases and, given his keen interest in public health, he was responsible for the creation and development of a Department of Public Health. In addition, he was responsible for the development of Public Health teaching and a Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health was offered by the University from 1891 onwards. As a member of the University Senate he also played a key role in the extension and development of the University Medical School and Marischal College from the 1880s onwards. He also went on to represent the University on the General Medical Council, the Carnegie Trust and the Medical Research Committee, later the Medical Research Council.

In his parallel roles as Medical Officer of Health and physician in charge of the City Hospital he promoted the creation of a Public Health Laboratory, eventually opened in 1920, and promoted the extension and development of the City Hospital in the treatment of infectious diseases including typhoid and tuberculous. He quickly gained a personal reputation for fighting infectious disease as can be seen in the illustration below recorded in the "Bon Accord" publication in 1891 which shows him fighting the great "furies" or infectious diseases of the time.



14 Professor Matthew Hay, in his role as MOH, assailed by the furies of typhoid, measles, influenza, whooping cough and scarlet fever. *Bon Accord*, 12 December 1891, p. 16.

During his tenure as Medical Officer of Health Hay promoted the expansion of better, more hygienic and modern facilities and, along with the aforementioned extension of the City Hospital, new hospitals opened including Kingseat Mental Hospital in 1904 and Oldmill Hospital, now Woodend Hospital in 1907. He also took a keen interest in Mother and Child Welfare promoting the introduction of health visitors and child welfare schemes and helped to found the residential homes at Linn Moor and Scotstoun.

Hay's keen interest in public health and, particularly to the causes of infant mortality, a notable cause of death in overcrowded Aberdeen, led him to support slum clearance and better housing and he was a keen supporter of the Aberdeen (Housing of the Working Classes) Improvement Scheme 1894.

As a result of his medical and public health work Matthew Hay became convinced of the benefit of building new and fit for purpose primary hospitals in Aberdeen- namely Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital and Aberdeen Maternity Hospital- and co-locating them on a healthy green field site. He also advocated for the University of Aberdeen Medical School, then based at Marischal College, to also move to the same site to support high quality teaching and research linked to the hospitals for the benefit of patients. These ideas, which developed into the "Joint Hospitals Scheme" were novel for their time. Hay's ideas also contributed to the development of a national health service for which he was an early proponent writing in 1916 "A single communal or state health and medical service would give the best results for the health of the community".

The "Joint Hospitals Scheme" proposal was presented to a special meeting of the Aberdeen Medico-Chirurgical Society" in February 1920 and was formally enacted when land was purchased by the Aberdeen Town Council at Foresterhill for the scheme in 1922.

Matthew Hay retired from his public health positions in 1923 and from his Professorship in Forensic Medicine in 1928. He lived long enough to see the laying of a foundation stone for the new Aberdeen Royal Infirmary by the Prince of Wales in August 1928 and the opening of the new Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital at Foresterhill in January 1929. Sadly, however he passed away at his home in Aberdeen in 1932 at the age of 76 prior to the completion of his "Joint Hospitals Scheme".

At the time of his death Matthew Hay was a nationally recognised and respected figure and his lengthy obituary in the British Medical Journal in August 1932 already noted him as being the "...original projector of the joint hospitals scheme". It also describes him as having..."indefatigable energy...remarkable initiative and constructive powers and ...statesmanlike qualities of mind... [which] have by common consent, been of vital importance to the country and to the University...".

The success of the “Joint Hospital Scheme”, in addition to Hay’s many other remarkable achievements assures his legacy lives on in the twenty first century. The Foresterhill campus has grown and developed over the past century to keep pace with changing populations and health care innovations and continues to lie at the heart of health care in Aberdeen and the North East of Scotland. A place where the emphasis is on the importance of combining medical training, research and healthcare for the benefit of patients and the community.