



International Evangelical Hospital

State-Recognised Ecclesiastical Institution

A BRIEF HISTORY

We have to go back in time to 1848 to find the conditions that resulted in the establishment of a hospital inspired by evangelical principles. It was then that King Charles Albert of Savoy promulgated the Fundamental Statute of the Monarchy of Savoy, more commonly known as the Albertine Statute. The new Ruling gave substantial freedom of conscience and granted equality to all subjects before the law, although some forms of discrimination persisted. One example was that those who were not of the State religion were subject to pressure and harassment, and could find it difficult to find a place in hospital.

In Genoa, this distress was particularly felt by the growing number of residents who were also members of protestant churches. Thanks to the development of port related commercial and merchant-traffic activity, many foreign communities from Central and Northern European protestant countries settled in Genoa in the course of the nineteenth century.

During a very severe cholera epidemic, it was felt necessary to set up a hospice in order to save Protestants from persistent Catholic attempts to change their religious beliefs. To do this, a Committee was constituted, on 5th February 1856, made up of representatives from the various protestant and evangelical churches in Genoa (Anglican, Scottish Presbyterian, Swiss reformed and Waldensian). It issued a statement expressing the intention, under the watchful eye and with the assistance of the Lord, of establishing a haven for those in urgent need, with the hope that under the blessing of God, it would be possible to develop an establishment sufficient for the needs of all poor and sick Evangelicals.

The first Protestant Hospital was set up the following year in Salita San Gerolamo 75, with eleven beds. In 1861, the Italian Free Church entered the administration. In 1867, the Hospital moved to Palazzo Morro, in Piazza San Bartolomeo degli Armeni (today Salita Superiore San Rocchino). Two years later, the Lutheran Church joined the administration.

In 1871, fifteen years after the founding of the Hospital, the decision was taken to accept non-Protestant patients; upholding, however, the inalienable right of all to freedom of conscience and prohibiting any attempt to convert them to another religion. The Hospital is neither the place nor the time to do so, and to exert any religious coercion would be to forsake the most sacred of duties.

Under a Royal Decree signed on 2nd March 1876, the Hospital was appointed a not-for-profit institution and became a legal entity. This permitted the Hospital to purchase the previously rented mansion. In 1932, the 75th anniversary of its foundation, the name was changed from Ospedale Protestante to Ospedale Evangelico Internazionale (OEI). Damage from a British naval bombardment in 1942 caused the suspension of activities until 25th March 1946. The first centenary was celebrated in 1957.

In 1969, after a period of growth, the International Evangelical Hospital was classified a "General Hospital" in the new regional health service. It commenced a new and positive experience which resulted, in 1985, in the signing of the Agreement Protocol between the Tavola Valdese (Waldensian Board), representing the founding Churches, and the Liguria Region.

In 1997, a Convention was signed with the Liguria Region and the Hospital became an official part of the local health service. In 1998, OEI became an autonomous special-status Institute within the Waldensian Order and was officially confirmed a not-for-profit religious institution. In 2005, OEI was the first hospital in Liguria to receive Institutional Accreditation. In 2006, the Waldensian Board and Liguria Region signed a Protocol Codicil that further clarified their relationship. In its 150th anniversary year, 2007, a new agreement was signed with the Liguria Region that recognised the Hospital as an integral part of the Liguria Health System.

Since May 2011, following a three-way agreement with the Liguria Region and ASL 3 "Genovese", OEI Castelletto also manages the hospital unit in Genoa Voltri; an important part of the healthcare organisation covering the central-western sections of the Genoa metropolitan area.

The International Evangelical Hospital has deep roots in the city of Genoa and in the hearts of the people. Even though history has erased the religious reasons for the founding of the Hospital, the teachings of the Gospel still guide administrators in its governance. Links between OEI, the Liguria Region and the city's institutions are also stronger than ever.