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Message from the President- Vidyajyothi Professor Lalitha Mendis



The present day alumni of the Colombo Medical Faculty are those who entered its precincts between the 1950s and 2008 or so. We and those before us not only entered a Faculty of Medicine, but launched into a period of our lives in which we felt like adults with exciting freedom, independent thought, and fascinating interactions and experiences. Many of us found our life partners there and others entered the competitive sphere of marriage markets. There were among us high achievers, average performers and those interesting 'chronics' who failed exams with gay abandon and to whom the distractions of the common room, billiards, cards, carrom, chess, a piano and endless cups of tea and cigarettes was more enticing than lectures, dissections, practicals, tutorials etc. The Faculty has ingrained in our minds un-erasable memories.

Our life at the Faculty was the springboard for our achievements that made us what we are today, both in Sri Lanka and overseas. Most importantly, we had that excellent medical education absolutely free; a veritable gymkhana when we consider what some of us and friends spend on medical education for their children.

My question to you is; can we give something in return as a token of our gratitude? The Colombo Medical School Alumni Association provides one roadway to do this. Since its inception in 2011, it has through various donations, large and small, engaged in funding a variety of much needed improvements to the Faculty, provided books and computers for the library and funded students in need as well as high performing students. CoMSAA also offers great opportunities for fellowship and enjoyment especially at the Annual International Academic Session and get together. I appeal to CoMSAA members to popularize CoMSAA and encourage other alumni who are not members to join. Life membership is only Rs 5000/-, even payable in two installments, if you so wish.

I hope this year to contact as many alumni as possible, make CoMSAA membership more attractive, to continue assistance to the Faculty and its students, provide opportunities for fellowship and encourage alumni to record their remembrances of Faculty days, which we hope if possible to publish as a book. There are already many such contributions of the good old days by alumni which can be read in the CoMSSA website (www.comsaa.org) and the blog maintained by Dr Philip Veerasingham (comsaa.blogspot.com). We will also keep you informed through the CoMSAA news letter.

I left the Faculty in 2002 and have returned as President CoMSAA having journeyed through the PGIM, SLMA and SLMC. I am happy that my swan song will be in our beloved Faculty.

With best wishes

***Notes from the Past President: Deshamanya Vidyajyothi Dr J B Peiris
(President, CoMSAA 2012-13)***

The Colombo Medical School, now known as the Medical Faculty of the University of Colombo, is 143 years old and the second oldest in Asia. Sri Lanka has 8 state medical schools with approximately 1500 qualifying as doctors each year. In addition, there are about 300 overseas graduates who qualify to practice medicine in Sri Lanka each year. The Postgraduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM) of the University of Colombo, established in 1980, trains medical graduates to specialize in all fields of medicine.

The Medical School in Colombo initially delivered a traditional training programme with 2 years of the Basic Sciences (Anatomy, Physiology and Biochemistry) followed by paramedical sciences of Pathology, Bacteriology, Pharmacology, Forensic Medicine and Public Health before clinical and hospital based training in Clinical medicine, Paediatrics, Surgery, Obstetrics and Gynaecology. The faculty now offers an integrated programme in a modular format with facilities for self learning.

The oldest building in the Faculty is the Anatomy building next to the JMO's office on Francis road. The Anatomy building dates back to 1813. The buildings that house the other departments are situated in a cluster with entry through the main entrance on Kynsey road.

The other buildings on Kynsey road include original administrative block, the De Soysa Maternity Hospital donated by Sir Charles Henry De Soysa and the Institute of Neurology built entirely from public donations with the leadership provided by the Senior Consultant Neurologist, Dr J B Peiris. The Colombo Medical Faculty has no residential campus though it has a few male and female hostels. The alumni, who were initially awarded the diploma of LMS (Ceylon) and later MBBS (Ceylon), now obtain the qualification of MBBS (Colombo) on successful completion of 5 years of training.

The alumni are scattered all over the world. This probably contributed to the late birth of an alumnus association only 2 years ago, when compared to the Peradeniya Medical School Alumnus Association (PeMSAA) which has celebrated 50 years and the Ruhuna Medical School Alumnus Association which has surpassed 25 years.

Within these two years, the CoMSAA (Colombo Medical School Alumnus Association) has been able to achieve much with the help of its local and overseas alumni.

The achievements of the CoMSAA include:

- A Donation of books worth Rs 2 million to the library from 4 of its US based alumni
- Computers worth Rs 500,000 by a US alumnus
- A donation of Rs 500,000 by a non-medical professional, to the best achiever at the Basic Sciences examination - equivalent of the 2nd MBBS. The donor preferred to make a donation which would help a future icon of the alumni rather than a needy student
- A donation of 5 computers and network printer by the class of 1958-63 who celebrated the golden jubilee this year
- A donation Rs 396,000 from the class of 1968- 1973
- A donation of Rs 135,000 from the class of 1963-1968 following the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of entry

- The Founder President and his committee arranged for a donation of a piano, billiards table and TV for the common room, which is now a uni- sex common room.
- We have obtained and approved a reasonable quote to repair the leaking roof of the Women's hostel which is in a terrible state.

While collecting funds is of paramount importance, proper and adequate utilization of such funds is equally important. CoMSAA has earned a reputation for being the most important and trustworthy investment portal for alumni, both locally and overseas.

We have stressed the need to support the alumni and future alumni in these ventures.

FACILITIES FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS:

- 2 grants of Rs 50,000 each for students to present their research at an international conference in the Netherlands
- 5 grants of Rs 25,000 each for students to compete in the International Quiz contest in Physiology in Malaysia
- A piano, TV and a multimedia projector for the Common room

While the executive committee of CoMSAA has been very active it has had the support of the Dean, Prof. Rohan Jayasekara, who has been very helpful with the channeling of the donations. CoMSAA has also had 2 very successful International Congresses and Reunions which have stimulated further service oriented activities.

CoMSAA Annual General Meeting, 26th September 2013, Colombo, Sri Lanka.



Induction of the new President
Prof.Lalitha Mendis



Presidents past and present

The CoMSAA Annual General Meeting was held on the 26th of September 2013 at the Colombo Medical Faculty. The Annual Report was presented by Dr. Piyusha Attapattu, the Co-Secretary, highlighting achievements of CoMSAA during the previous year. The Treasurer, Prof. Jennifer Perera presented the Financial Report for the second year.

Dr. J B Peiris, the Outgoing President thanked the executive committee for the hard work. He presented the numerous activities undertaken by CoMSAA, specially with regard to the financial assistance given to medical students and the numerous donations in books, computers and printers.

The election of new Office Bearers for 2013/2014 then took place. Following her induction, Prof. Lalitha Mendis delivered the Presidential Address. Dr. Sameera Gunawardena, the new Co-Secretary delivered the Vote of Thanks. The meeting was followed by a reception.

CoMSAA Council 2013-2014

- **President** Vidyajothi Professor Lalitha Mendis
- **President - elect** Dr. B.J.C. Perera
- **Vice Presidents** Professor Jennifer Perera
Dr. Deepa Wimalasena
Professor Athula Kaluarachchi
- **Co-Secretaries** Dr. Sameera Gunawardena
Dr. Sanjeevani Rupasinghe
- **Treasurer** Dr. Nalika Gunawardene
- **Assistant Treasurer** Dr Romain Perera
- **Editor** Dr. Indika Karunathilake
- **Social Secretary** Dr Saroja Siriwardene
- **Committee** Dr. G. Shanthilal de Silva
Dr Sarath Gamini de Silva
Dr. Dennis J. Aloysius
Dr Nanda Amarasekera
Dr. Chandra Jayasuriya
Professor Sumedha Wijeratne
Dr. Aruni Wariyapola
Dr. Ashwini de Abrew
Dr. Jayantha Dayasena
Dr. Kavinda Dayasiri

Second International Conference held at 'Blue Water', Wadduwa

The 2nd International Congress and Reunion of the CoMSAA was held on 7th and 8th of September 2013 at the Hotel Blue Water, Wadduwa. This very successful event was attended by a large number of alumni and their families, amounting to a total of 240 participants. Approximately 100 participants stayed overnight and enjoyed the spontaneous merrymaking on the night of September 7th.

The Second Scientific Congress took place on 8th September. Dr. J B Peiris, President /CoMSAA welcomed the participants and awarded the Founder President's medal to Prof. A H Sheriffdeen at the Inauguration Ceremony.

The Academic Programme included six interesting presentations delivered by Dr. Philip Veerasingam, Dr. Anuruddha Abeygunasekera, Dr. Ruvan Ekanayake, Dr. Lakshman Senanayake, Prof. Saman Gunathilleke and Dr. Surangani de Lanerolle. This was followed by an action-packed debate on "Giving detailed medical information to lay public on mass media is counter-productive". The debate was followed by lunch and fellowship with fun filled activities, music and dancing.

Highlights of the event are given below.



Anatomy Block Centenary Commemoration – Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo

The Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo celebrated its hundredth anniversary on the 3rd of November 2013. The “Block”, as the Anatomy building is well known, was opened in 1913 by Sir Robert Chalmers, the then Governor of Ceylon. Since then generations of medical students have passed through its doorways and taught by eminent academics. The Anatomy Block Centenary Commemoration was a celebration of this architectural monument and heritage of scholarship.

The Commemoration was organized by a team of academics, non-academics and medical undergraduates led by the Head of the Department of Anatomy, Dr Madhuwanthi Dissanayake, under the patronage of Prof. Rohan Jayasekara, Senior Professor of Anatomy and Dean Faculty of Medicine, Colombo. The event was graced by Prof Kshanika Hirimburegama, Chairperson, University Grants Commission. Retired senior academics of the Department of Anatomy, Professors, Deans and Administrative Officers of the University of Colombo and academic and non-academic staff representing all departments of the Faculty, students, Members of Sri Lanka Medical Association(SLMA), the Colombo Medical School Alumni Association (COMSAA) and many other distinguished invitees were among the participants.



Prof. Kshanika Hirimburegama, Chairperson University Grants Commission being welcomed to the Anatomy Block Centenary Commemorations by Prof. Rohan Jayasekara Dean Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo

The Sunday morning event started with the Welcome Address delivered by the Head of the Department of Anatomy Dr. Madhuwanthi Dissanayake. This was followed by the Keynote Address by Professor Rohan Jayasekara who was introduced to the gathering by Dr. Ajith Malalasekara, Senior Lecturer, Department of Anatomy. Professor Jayasekara recounted the significant milestones achieved by the department over the last 100 year in his Keynote Address titled “100 years and Beyond”. Along with the illuminating details of history retold, a few inspirational thoughts were expressed and are as follows :-

“Our Centennial offers us not only the occasion to celebrate our distinguished history, but also provides a window through which we can begin contemplating our future.”

“This year, as we celebrate the centenary of this department and as we launch into its next millennium, the dignified maturity and the firm spirit of initiating, innovating and implementing has never burned so bright.”

He concluded with the words,

“This Department basks in the glory of a rich past. Today, faith has given us the courage to face the present with confidence and the future with expectancy. ”



Prof. Rohan Jayasekara Senior Professor of Anatomy and Dean Faculty of Medicine, Delivering the Keynote Address

A Centenary Souvenir with extracts of the Keynote Address and many interesting contributions from the alumni received from distinguished medical professionals, medical students and well wishers was launched on that day by Dr Madhuwanthi Dissanayake, Head, Department of Anatomy, University of Colombo and Dr Nirmala Sirisena, Lecturer Department of Anatomy and Head Souvenir Editorial Committee. The Souvenir is a precious collection of memories shared in the form of prose, poetry and photographs, a collector's item of over 90 pages.

The day was filled with remembrance of pioneering Professors of the Department who worked for the Department, Faculty and the Nation. The Anatomy museum, which contains specimens meticulously dissected through the years, was dedicated on this day to the memory of the late Prof P.S.S. Panditharathne, Chair of Anatomy from 1975 to 1998. Many of the specimens seen in the museum were dissected by him and placed in the museum for the learning of generations of students. His citation was read by Dr. D. J. Anthony, Senior Lecturer, Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, Colombo.



A section of the audience present at the Anatomy Block Centenary Commemoration

The Department of Anatomy conducted an Educational workshop titled "A Journey through the Human Body" in August of this year for G. C. E. Ordinary and Advanced Level students as part of the centenary celebrations of the Department. The motivating idea behind this was to instill in school children an enthusiasm and curiosity about the Anatomy of the human body and hopefully promoting enthusiasm towards a career in medical and allied health specialties. This event was a collaborative effort of the academics of the department, research assistants, non-academic staff and medical students. During the Block Commemoration Ceremony the service rendered by the non-academics, research assistants and medical students were duly recognised by presenting them with certificates of appreciation.

Following the Vote of Thanks proposed by Prof Vajira Dissanayake, Professor in Anatomy, the participants of the Centenary Commemoration had the opportunity to relive their past as medical students of the Block, through a guided tour of the Old Anatomy Lecture Theatre by two senior lecturers of the department, Dr. Mirna Kumaradas and Dr. Hemali Goonesekara. Declared a Historical monument by the Conservation Division of the Archeological Department, this amphitheatre is currently in the process of being renovated.



**Invitees of the Anatomy Block Centenary
Commemoration visiting the Old
Anatomy Lecture Hall/ Amphitheatre**

The commemoration concluded mid-morning with many participants being immersed in the glorious past; listening to inspiring speeches, meeting their fellow batch mates, recounting tales of student days and wandering through the Old Anatomy Amphitheatre.

Share your nostalgic memories of medical school days!

CoMSAA plans to publish a souvenir comprising reminiscences of the members. You are invited to contribute to this publication and share your memories with us. The write-up should not exceed 1500 words and should be in times new roman font size 12. Please email your write-up to the editor, COMSAA newsletter (karunathilake@hotmail.com). Cartoons, stories and photographs too are welcome.

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Editorial Assistance : Dr MH Ishara, Dr Ashwini de Abrew

Photographs courtesy of Dr Phillip Veerasingham and Ms. Rasika Mendis