



COMSAA NEWSLETTER

CoMSAA Council 2019/2020

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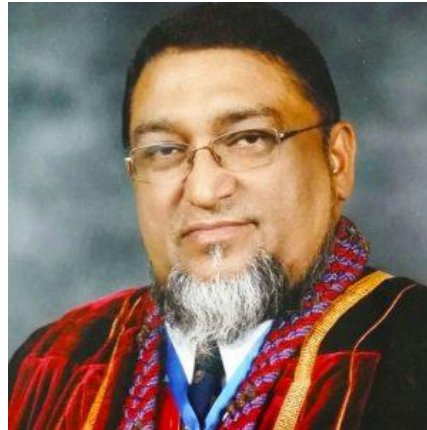
Dr. Shanthilal de Silva



Contents

President's Message	3
CoMSAA Activities – A Report from the Co-secretaries	4
150-Year Anniversary Celebrations	8
News from our Students	16
From the Editors	19
Members' Corner	20
Notices	24

President's Message – Year 2019/2020



It gives me great pleasure to give a brief message to the first newsletter for the year 2019-2020. We have had a wonderful start with the Congress of our Faculty of Medicine at its 150th year. Many groups of alumni met and it was an opportunity to get new members for CoMSAA.

The next few weeks were a terrible period for the CoMSAA, faculty and committee due to the Coronavirus or COVID-19 disaster. We managed one invitation lecture on the Sinharaja forest in early February of 2020. We have had some difficulty in sending money to reach our scholarship holders because the banks were closed and frequent curfews made it difficult. We have not had two council meetings because of the coronavirus curfew and social distancing issues.

I sincerely hope we can get our reunion plans started off and waiting anxiously for lockdown relief in the country.

Thank you

Rezvi Sheriff

CoMSAA activities - first half of the year A Report from the Co-secretaries 2019/2020

By Dr. Sumudu Suranadee and Prof. Hemali Goonasekera

CoMSAA Co-secretaries – 2019/2020

The CoMSAA Annual General Meeting for the year 2019 was held on November 19, 2019 and the CoMSAA Executive committee for 2019/2020 took over office and commenced its activities under the leadership of the President Vidya Jyothi Professor MHR Sheriff and supported by all the members of the Executive Committee. A report of the activities carried out during the first half of the year are as follows:

1. Colombo Medical Congress 2020

The Colombo Medical Faculty is celebrating its 150th Anniversary in 2020 and a series of commemorative activities have been planned throughout the year. The activities commenced with the “Colombo Medical Congress” which was held successfully from February, 12-15, 2020 at the Colombo Medical Faculty premises. The CoMSAA is proud to be the main collaborator of the Medical Faculty on this historic event.

The Congress programme included a CoMSAA panel discussion titled “Engaging with the Alumni: Visions and Strategies”, chaired by the incumbent CoMSAA President Vidya Jyothi Professor MHR Sheriff and President elect Vidya Jyothi Dr. Prasad Katulanda and eminent personalities Sir Arulkumaran Sabaratnam (UK), Professor Dushyantha Jayaweera (USA), Professor Dilendra Haritha Weerasinghe (USA) and Professor AH Sherifdeen participating in the panel discussion. The outcomes of the discussion will be taken forward for further action by the CoMSAA committee.



Panelists and Participants following the CoMSAA panel discussion

The CoMSAA stall attracted the attention of many delegates attending the Colombo Medical Congress (CMC). The CoMSAA membership drive was the main agenda of the stall and resulted in 38 new members joining CoMSAA during the three days. The CoMSAA activities were also showcased via a running video and CoMSAA memorabilia were sold at the stall. We wish to thank the students of the Colombo Medical Faculty who took turns to support the CoMSAA members to man the stall throughout the three days of the conference.



CoMSAA stall at the Colombo Medical Congress

2. Peduru Party

The event was held in the evening of February 14, 2020 at the newly renovated faculty quadrangle. It was organized to coincide with the CMC, to give an opportunity for alumni to meet up and reminiscence the times they spent in the faculty together. Alumni with their family members were joined by a large number of students, totaling approximately 400, were entertained to an evening of music by many Alumni and current students of the faculty who sang popular songs and melodies. We are grateful to Prof. Ishan de Zoysa and Prof. Madhuwanthi Dissanayake for their excellent organization of the event with Prof. de Zoysa finding two sponsors. We extend our gratitude to the faculty non-academic staff for their untiring support given.



(a)



(b)



(c)

(a) President CoMSAA Vidya Jyothi Prof. Rezvi Sheriff making his opening remarks at the start of the Peduru Party; (b & c) Sections of the gathering

3. The CoMSAA Lecture

Continuing the tradition of previous years', the CoMSAA Lecture 2020 was held on March 13, 2020 at the New Building Lecture Theatre of the Faculty of Medicine. The invited lecturer was Professor Emeritus Savitri Gunatilleke, Emeritus Professor Department of Botany, University of Peradeniya. Professor Emeritus Savitri Gunatilleke has a long career in forest ecology and has been a leader in quantitative ecology and education. Along with her husband; Emeritus Professor Nimal Gunatilleke, she has carried out many award winning work. The alumni, present students of the faculty and invited guests spent a very inspiring and educational hour with her talking on the topic of 'Sri Lanka's Rich Ecosystem Diversity: Challenges, Saving, Studying and Using Them'.

The event concluded with presentation of the Past President's Medal to President 2018/2019, Dr. Iyanthi Abeyewickreme by the current CoMSAA President.



Professor Savitri Gunatilleke delivering the CoMSAA Lecture 2020



Vidya Jyothi Professor Rezvi Sheriff presenting the Past President's Medal to Dr. Iyanthi Abeyewickrema

4. Invited lecture by Professor Hendrik Syse

An invited lecture facilitated by Professor Indika Karunathilake, was held on February 20, 2020 at the Faculty Board Room. The speaker, Professor Hendrik Syse is a Norwegian philosopher, author, a research professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo and the vice president of the Norwegian Nobel Committee since 2015. His main area of specialization is ethics and he delivered a very illuminating talk on the subject titled “Promoting Ethics in Professionalism in Medicine” to a gathering of Alumni and members of the Mosvold-Martinus Foundation, which has provided scholarships to medical students of the Colombo Medical Faculty.



Professor Hendrik Syse delivering his lecture

Future Activities

The CoMSAA was in the stages of planning the Annual Reunion at a Hotel away from Colombo in early September, CoMSAA quiz and anniversary celebrations related activity, CoMSAA walk, when the COVID-19 pandemic arose restricting social activities. Currently the members' view regarding their attending the former events is being sought. All events will be subjected to Government health advisories in the coming months.

The major project, which our President wishes to carry forward this year by CoMSAA, is the Ladies Medical Hostel Project. We are currently in the process of gathering information regarding the requirements. Subsequently finding a suitable site for the building and raising funds for the project will be the main challenges we would face. We look forward to generous support from our Alumnus for this worthy cause.

The photos of all the above events and Emeritus Professor Savitri Gunatillake's recorded lecture have been uploaded to the Facebook page in the CoMSAA Website.

We wish to thank Dr. Rezni Cassim and Dr. Sumithra Tissera our Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer, respectively for handling the CoMSAA accounts, Prof. Nirmala Wijekoon and Dr. Dineshani Hettiarachchi for getting the Newsletter out on time during this difficult time and our President Vidya Jyothi Professor MHR Sheriff and the rest of the members of the CoMSAA executive committee for their guidance and support given to us to carry out our work. We are grateful for all the secretarial and other supportive assistance given by Ms. Mass Zainab Usuf, CoMSAA demonstrator for all the above events.

150-Year Anniversary Celebrations

COLOMBO MEDICAL CONGRESS 2020

MEDICINE IN SRI LANKA: THE LEGACY AND THE FUTURE

By Dr Santuhsi Amarasuriya, Dr. Prasad Katulanda and Prof. Saroj Jayasinghe

The Colombo Medical Congress 2020 was held from 12th to 15th February 2020 as part of the 150-year anniversary celebrations of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo. It was a collaboration between the Faculty and CoMSAA.

We had almost 900 attendees at the Inauguration Ceremony which was held on 13th February 2020 at the Waters Edge Hotel. The Chief Guest was Professor Sir Sabaratnam Arulkumaran, a distinguished alumnus, and the Keynote speaker was Kamini Mendis, Professor Emeritus of Parasitology. A special highlight of historic significance was the recorded message by the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. He commended the Faculty's contributions to health in Sri Lanka and at a global level.

The Anniversary Publication, "Colombo Medical School at 150: Celebrating our Heritage" was launched at the Inauguration Ceremony. Twenty-nine distinguished persons were felicitated, including former Vice-Chancellors of the University of Colombo, former Deans of the Faculty of Medicine and former chair professors of the Faculty of Medicine who had retired from active service.

This was perhaps the largest ever medical congress in the country and had 303 lectures in 6 parallel sessions, 230 Abstracts (59 as oral presentations and 171 as posters) and 9 congress related workshops. A wide range of topics across almost all disciplines were selected and they ranged from clinical topics to genomics to planetary health to gender-based violence to medical humanities. There were two panel discussions, a Grand Plenary that explored 'Visions for the Future' and another on 'Engaging with Alumni'. The Congress programme, abstracts and other information was published and made available in a 234 paged high-quality publication printed at the Colombo University Press. Short 100-word abstracts of 300+ lectures and all the scientific abstracts were included in the publication. The concluding sessions had an awards ceremony for the best research papers with funds donated by University of Colombo Alumni Association of NSW Australia.

The first Colombo Medical Quiz titled "The University of Colombo Global Medical Challenge" was held with the participation of several universities from Sri Lanka and overseas. The alumni from the year AL 95/96 batch (second IBS batch) donated the prize. A Hackathon was held on utilizing water released from Reverse Osmosis plants in areas with high prevalence of CKDu. This was organized by The Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organization (ANSTO) to coincide with the Congress. Undergraduates from several universities participated.

Congress participation was highly satisfactory with a grand total of 1048. There was a total of 553 paid registrants and 495 student registrations. This is addition to the abstract presentations which had free registration and 430 registered for the congress workshops. Student participation was encouraged by offering free registration and the inclusion of the Congress lectures as time-tabled activities through Senate approval.

Number of social programmes were held along with the Colombo Medical Congress including History Walks and Nature walks organized to reminisce on historical aspects of the buildings in the National Hospital and the Faculty. Peduru Party hosted by CoMSAA was held on 14th of February at the newly opened green space in the former quadrangle of the Faculty. Several batch get-togethers and meetings were held during the Congress and lunch-time music was provided by teams of students. The Colombo Medical Banquet Organized by CoMSAA was held on the 15th of February at the Cinnamon Lakeside. This was a grand event with about 300 participants

The collective effort of many paved the way for an exceptionally successful Colombo Medical Congress. It demonstrated a novel model to plan and organize a medical congress. It brought together several generations of alumni and it was an opportunity to attract considerable goodwill to the Faculty. A number of research networks and collaborations were established. The process developed for securing and mobilizing funds for the Congress minimized potential conflicts of interest. The Congress provided healthy food options to participants and use of plastics was minimized.

There is a consensus that the Congress should be an annual event that will be a focal point for research groups to meet and for the alumni to interact with different stake holders, including students.

Outcomes

1. This was the first time that there was a close collaboration with the Faculty and alumni association, CoMSAA, in the organization of an event of this magnitude, including obtaining funds and organizing the Colombo Medical Banquet.
2. Conducting the Congress gave confidence to the Faculty that it can conduct a massive congress of this nature.
3. We demonstrated a novel model to plan and organize a medical congress. Hitherto the pattern was to have these conferences in 5-star hotels at considerable costs. Having it at the Faculty cut down on the costs and made it possible for the alumni to revisit their lecture halls and regular haunts and re-live their past as medical students, bringing back nostalgic memories. It also allowed the alumni and present students to interact and network.
4. Selecting the Faculty premises as the venue helped the Faculty to upgrade its facilities and infrastructure.
5. We introduced a process for securing funds for medical congresses which minimized potential conflicts of interest, especially with the pharmaceutical trade by having unrestricted educational grants and not allowing trade stalls or promotional materials regarding drugs.
6. The Congress brought together several generations of alumni, some came to the Faculty for the first time after several decades. This event has attracted considerable goodwill to the Faculty.
7. Student participation was ensured by making the congress a time-tabled academic activity for the students.
8. The first Colombo Medical Quiz was held over 3 days. The buzzers and computer systems were provided by E-Soft headed by Dr. Dayan Rajapakshe, an alumnus. This could become an annual event.
9. Research networks and collaborations: Discussions were held on strengthening collaborations in medical ethics (University of Miami, USA), leishmaniasis (University of Ohio, USA), medical education (Universities of Salford and Manchester, UK) CKDu (University of Sydney, Australia) Urban Health

(University of Berkeley, USA) and medical devices (University of Moratuwa and Department of Physics).

10. The University Publications Unit produced its key maiden publication with a very high-quality Congress Book that had the programme, 100-word abstracts from 300+ speakers and the oral and poster abstracts. The abstracts will be published in the Ceylon Journal of Medical Science as a supplement.
11. The 150th year Anniversary Volume documenting the history of the Faculty was released during the Inauguration.
12. The webpage and abstract submission system were maintained through an in-house mechanism.
13. Professional expertise for the Congress branding and related designs and the floral arrangements were provided by our own alumni who have branched out as entrepreneurs. The logo was developed by a team headed by Dr. Dinil Abeygunawardena and Dr Yasas Abeywickrama, the floral arrangements were by Lassana Flora headed by Dr Lasantha Malavige.
14. Music was provided during the lunchtime breaks by the medical students. This was organized by Dr Nilanka Wickramasinghe. A well-attended musical evening ('Peduru Party') was held on the 14th of February organized by the alumni association, CoMSAA. Students were encouraged to form a Colombo Medical Dance Troupe, The Colombo Medical Choir and The Colombo Medical Orchestra.
15. History Walks were held during the sessions. A Corona virus protocol for greeting (Ayubowan with clasped hands rather than handshakes) was introduced in an informal manner. In retrospect, this was probably the first event in the world where a simple action was introduced, which has since become the norm for most meetings and conferences, post- pandemic of COVID-19 (declared on 11 March 2020 by the WHO)
16. A Planetary Health Network was established to take forward the agenda of preserving the health of the planet and the health of the people.
17. We had a memory board that had signatures of more than a hundred participants.
18. We have obtained videos, photographs and audio-recordings of the lectures and these will be a permanent record of this historic event.
19. The following names will hopefully be registered as trademarks of the Faculty of Medicine:
 - Colombo Medical Congress
 - Colombo Medical Quiz (or Colombo Global Medical Challenge)
 - Colombo Medical Banquet
 - Colombo Medical Exhibition
 - Colombo Medical Walk
 - A Colombo Medical Congress logo
20. Support the initiative to establish a Colombo Clinical Society at the National Hospital of Sri Lanka as suggested by the Deputy DGHS during his lecture.

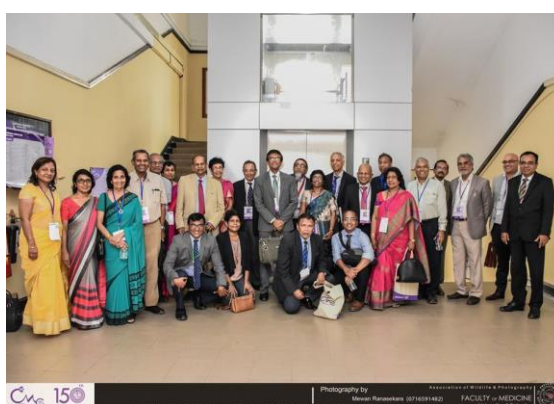
Postscript:

The Congress escaped the COVID-19 epidemic by a whisker. By the 12th of February the epidemic was raging in China and already termed as a pandemic by the WHO. Nevertheless, the Congress used the 'Corona Protocol' for greeting with the preferred use of the Ayubowan as a form of greeting compared to the handshake, a historical first! The epidemic commenced in the country on 11th March with the detection of the first Sri Lankan having the infection. The previously diagnosed patient was a Chinese tourist who contracted the virus in China and therefore not counted as the first case in Sri Lanka.

Inauguration



Congress



Banquet



Paduru Party



University of Colombo Global Medical Challenge 2020

By Dr. Maduka de Lanerolle-Dias

The University of Colombo Global Medical Challenge 2020, a medical quiz among undergraduate medical students provided both an opportunity for improving medical knowledge and bringing about fellowship between medical students of different faculties. This was held on the 14th & 15th of February 2020 as part of the Colombo Medical Congress hosted by the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo to commemorate 150 years since its inception.

An evening of fellowship was held on the 14th of February for the students to interact and get to know each other. Thirty participants from 10 universities (University of Colombo, University of Peradeniya, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, University of Kelaniya, University of Jaffna, Eastern University, University of Ruhuna, University of Rajarata, Kothalawala Defence University (KDU) and International Medical University (IMU), Malaysia) participated in a preliminary screening round, from which 8 teams went through to the semifinals. Four teams contested with each for the semifinals and the final.

The Medical challenge was a roaring success, with a jovial master of ceremonies who kept the teams and the audience on their toes. The event was well attended and the audience was lively. The challenge trophy was bagged by the home team, University of Colombo, with the University of Peradeniya in second place and International Medical University (IMU), Malaysia in 3rd place.

We were truly blessed to have the support of our alumni. MFC 1995/96 batch of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo were our main sponsor donating the entire prize money of Rs. 850,000/= for this event. In addition, we are thankful to CoMSAA (Colombo Medical School Alumni Association) for sponsoring the rest of the expenses.

Our heartfelt gratitude to two of our prestigious alumni, Dr. Dayan Rajapaksa, and Mr. Shankar Dilip Visvanathan, for stepping in at the hour of need. Dr. Rajapaksa, who is the managing director of ESOFT Computer Studies Pvt Ltd (ESOFT), went an extra mile to provide us with an up to date computer software system to manage the entire quiz. Mr. Visvanathan, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at Whipps Cross University Hospital, London, joined us all the way from the United Kingdom as the Master of ceremonies.

Organizing the quiz, amidst other duties was a challenge in itself to the organizing committee. They worked tirelessly in putting together the questions, inviting and coordinating teams from other faculties and organizing logistics for the quiz as well as the fellowship. Plans are underway to continue this medical challenge as an annual event; an event that will bring glory to the Faculty and unite our medical professions of the future.



Winners – University of Colombo



2nd Place – University of Peradeniya



3rd place - International Medical University (IMU), Malaysia



Participants

News from our students

Medical undergraduates coming to the fore in many aspects

The previous issues of CoMSAA newsletter highlighted the advancements of medical undergraduates in research field. Continuing the same momentum throughout 2019 and 2020, undergraduate research projects gained recognition in science forums and competitions held in last few months, including but not limited to the Colombo Medical Congress which was held along with the 150th anniversary celebration of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo.

Numerous events/activities have been successfully carried out by Medical Faculty Students' Union, Medical Students' Welfare Society, Medical Students' Buddhist Association, Catholic Medical Students' Society, Medical Students' Hindu Society, Medical Faculty Muslim Majlis, University of Colombo Clinical Society, Anatomical Society, Association of Wildlife and Photography, Rotaract Club, Golden Z Club, Core Group for Disaster Relief and Medical Faculty Sports Association. Individual and collective efforts of our students have gained recognition at many national and international platforms.

Victorious in Quiz Competitions

- **University of Colombo Global Medical Challenge 2020**

The team representing Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo won the first place of the Global University Medical Challenge 2020 held along with Colombo Medical Congress in February 2020. The members of the winning team were Kasun Lakmal, Wasana Kodithuwakku and Manul Gunasekara.

- **Global University Medical Challenge**

Pamodh Yasawardene, Malintha Lahiru and Harini Piyatissa represented the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo in the Global University Medical Challenge held in April 2019 at the International Medical University of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- **Professor Carlo Fonseka Challenge Trophy**

Supun Fonseka, Tharindu Nimantha, Harini Piyatissa, Vismi Wijesna and Sahan Wijewantha represented the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo in the Professor Carlo Fonseka Challenge Trophy, inter-medical faculty physiology quiz 2019 organized by the Physiological Society, Sri Lanka. The team emerged victorious, defeating host team from Faculty of Medicine, Peradeniya at the final competition. The same team participated in the Professor A. Raman Challenge Trophy, the 17th Inter Medical School Physiology Quiz organised by and held at Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Indonesia.



Coming to the fore in Sports and related Activities

• World university games

Chethaka Wijegunasinghe participated at the 30th World University Games 2019 held in Napoli, Italy, representing Sri Lanka as the best University javelin thrower.



• National sports festival

Widuranga Wijerathne who was also the Karate captain of University of Colombo, won the bronze medal in Karate Kumite 60kg event at the National Sports Festival.

• FISU Volunteer Leaders Academy (FVLA) – 2020

Themiya Damruwan was selected by the Sri Lankan University Sports Association to represent Sri Lanka at FVLA 2020 held in Kazan, Russia as one of the two participants from Sri Lanka who would become the student ambassadors for Sri Lanka for a period of 1 year. Current FISU student ambassador for Sri Lanka, Akhila Nilaweera is also from Faculty of Medicine, Colombo. He was recently recognized and ranked among the top 20 of the most active student ambassadors in the world.

• Sri Lanka University Games (SLUG) – 2019

28 students from Faculty of Medicine, Colombo represented the University of Colombo at SLUG 2019, with five of them leading their respective teams (Widuranga Wijerathne – Captain, Karate Men's; Hasni Guneratne – Captain, Basketball Women's; Sachith de Silva- Captain, Swimming Men's; Sachin Colambage – Captain, Chess Men's; Buddhi Saranga – Vice Captain, Volleyball Men's)

• Inter Medical Faculty Championship

Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo became the champions at the Inaugural Inter Medical Faculty Championship organized by the Medical Faculty Sports Association of Faculty of Medicine, Colombo which was held from February to December 2019 with participation of sportsmen and women representing all the medical faculties in the country.

Achievements of Rotaract Club

The Rotaract Club of Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo won the bronze award for the best social media campaign at the Rotaract Assembly 2019 for their "You are not alone" post traumatic psychological impact awareness campaign following Easter Sunday attacks. The club also earned the Rotaract District Citation for a well-balanced year programme and was a significant achievement for the club to earn the citation during their first year of functioning.



Youth Parliament Election 2020

Dilshan Abeywardane, a final year student of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo was elected as a minister of Sri Lanka Youth Parliament, an institution which was established with the concept of “Yowun Pura” under the Ministry of Youth Affairs.

Medical Students join the battle against COVID-19

• Mechanical Cardiopulmonary Resuscitator (M-CPR) by Dilshan Abeywardhane

Manual Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation requires close contact of health care workers with the patients that in turn, can expose health care workers to COVID-19. Another drawback of Manual Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation is the fatigue of the health care worker that reduces the efficiency of latter part of chest compressions. The new M-CPR machine invented by Dilshan Abeywardhane, a final year medical student, is capable of providing 100 chest compressions per minute without any hassle in the optimum compression depth, while reducing health care worker-patient contact, thus reducing the probability of health care worker getting exposed to COVID-19. This new invention is being already presented to the academic staff of the Faculty of Medicine, Colombo, Sri Lanka New Inventors Commission, National Intellectual Property Office, National Youth Service Council and Ministry of Health.



• National COVID-19 Prevention Task Force call centre activities

Under the coordination of Medical Faculty Students' Action Committee, students of Colombo Medical Faculty got involved in the National COVID-19 Prevention Task Force call centre activities. They were tasked to direct people who contacted the hotline (#117) to relevant parties (to hospitals, MOH offices and Police stations) while taking brief histories via telephone at National Operation Centre for Prevention of COVID-19 Outbreak, Rajagiriya and Disaster Management Centre, Colombo 7.

From the Editors

The power of NOW: Being in the present moment

By Dr. Dineshani Hettiarachchi

"Your outer journey may contain a million steps; your inner journey only has one: the step you are taking right now."
- Eckhart Tolle

In recent years, there has been a tremendous interest in the "mindfulness" phenomena as a state of being. Mindfulness is a practice involved in various religious and secular traditions. Mindfulness interventions have been shown to remediate a range of problems, including depression, substance abuse, cravings, and anxiety. However, this is not a new concept for us in the East. It's being with us for several generations and narrated in many different ways. Its integration with western science was a crucial aspect in helping mindfulness gain widespread popularity in the West.

When we speak of practicing mindfulness you don't necessarily have to be in a quiet serene place with trickling water fountains and sounds of nature to practice mindfulness, although the latter would be nice it's not always a necessity. Mindfulness is the simple act of quietening the busy, over-active mind to focus on the present.

Why mindfulness is important now more than ever

You might be overly stressed without even knowing it. In an era where we are spoilt for choice with our never-ending worldly demands. It's crucial we take some time out to take a step back to breathe and take it all in and most importantly to learn to let go. Now more than ever we need the freedom that mindfulness invites us. The freedom to not have to follow the unconscious pattern of acute reactivity. Once in a while, we can train our minds to observe deeply what is happening and become aware of it. By doing so we become aware of our reactions to our daily encounters. As a result, how we respond to them comes through awareness rather than as a reflex. This enables us to choose kindness in our worlds and our actions and help to, move toward that which lessens suffering and creates happiness. Not only for us as individuals but for the betterment of humanity.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

1. Mindfulness of the body.
2. Mindfulness of feelings (or sensations).
3. Mindfulness of mind (or consciousness).
4. Mindfulness of mental phenomena (Eg. sense of self, purpose).

In a nutshell

When one is mindful, he or she is available to understand, think, speak, act or relate from a pristine state of consciousness. In this state, you're devoid of conditioning, preconceptions, judgments, circumstances, prejudice, predictions, diagnoses, fears, complaints, anxiety and drama. Hence mindfulness is when you are present and aware. In this sense, it is not something you do but something you observe in the absence of doing.

Reference:

Silananda U. The four foundations of mindfulness. Simon and Schuster, 2002.

Golubickis M et al. The observing self: Diminishing egocentrism through brief mindfulness meditation. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 2016;46(4): 521-527.

Members' Corner

REFLECTING ON CORONA...A COMSAANIAN VIEW!

Covid epidemics will appear and disappear, and COMSAA will continue! Each of us have felt the impact of Covid on our private and professional lives. If the epidemic rolls on, a few of us are not likely to survive. Nevertheless a few ideas may persist to enrich the future generations. This epidemic, as wild as it seems has helped humanity to take stock of the situation and recalibrate the way we live as a species.

What brought this on? Was it nature hitting back, God's wrath or sheer ill-luck? Of all these hypotheses what I like best is "nature hitting back". There are many believers of this view. Elements of this thinking was echoed by James Lovelock when he wrote the book *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the earth is fighting back – and how we can still save humanity*. He proposed the thesis that the earth should be considered as a 'living' system where the organisms interact with its inorganic environment and helps to maintain or sustain life on this planet. This living system is self-regulating and complex. With the continuing imbalance of the system, the positive feedback loops 'react' and allows mother nature to 'take revenge'. Very interesting!

I shall not dwell on the critique of this particular theory but say that it introduced a novel view of the place of humans on this planet. This 'systems' approach can be explored further and spiced up with a few facts. It goes to show how the human species is accelerating towards self-destruction by developing an ideal system for pandemics. Let us rewind and go back in history. Here are a few facts....

From the agricultural age (i.e. about 10,000 years ago) humans began to have farms, developed closely knit social groups and shifted to build villages, towns, cities and megacities. This has progressed at a pace and now more than 50% live in crowded urban spaces. The overcrowding is exacerbated by an increase in population to 7.8 billion. In addition to packing ourselves like a tin of sardines we are as mobile as the blowing winds. Our mobility has grown exponentially to the remotest corners of the earth. In 2018, 4.3 billion passengers were carried by airlines and there were more than a billion cars on the road, ideal carriers of viruses within countries and to all parts of the globe.

Since the origins of the agricultural age, humans have created havoc on all other living forms. As Yuval Harari says in his book *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*, Homo sapiens are "ecological serial killers". We have decimated species after species, driving more than 500 species to extinction within a short duration of 275 years. This has changed the balance between animals in nature. We are also encroaching on their land. At a global level, forest cover is reducing and is about 30.6% of land. Globally we are losing forests at a rapid rate, for example to make way for palm oil to be used in vegetable oil, shampoo and cosmetics and for farms, particularly soya plantations. With such invasions of their space, a range of wild animals are very likely to come into contact with humans.

Another potential source of mass scale animal-to-human transmission is animal husbandry. It is estimated that globally 70 billion animals are bred in farms for human consumption. Factory farming is increasingly practiced in developed countries which houses millions of poultry, pigs, cattle and other animals in constrained and controlled environments. These are well known fertile grounds for potential global epidemics.

Let's leave aside the tons of pollutants and plastics we dump to our environment. The erratic developments of urban areas with a combination of overcrowding, mobility of populations, increasing destruction of natural habitats, a large population of farm animals to act as reservoirs are all likely to contribute and accelerate the spread of contagions.

In such a fertile environment, we only need a single virus living within bats or other wild animals to mutate and develop the ability to enter human cells via the ACE-2 receptor. That's not too much to ask from a virus that replicates at a very rapid rate with a high rate of errors. These viruses must be laughing at the idiocy of an arrogant species that thought it could rule the world!

Saroj Jayasinghe

Chair Professor of Medicine
University of Colombo
Alumnus 1974-1979.

COVID 19, Man Made Misery?

Heard the birds singing, calling for a mate
Rolling in bed, disturbed, waking up late
Yet an empty day ahead, a prospect I hate
Reassuring myself soon, it's everyone's fate

Listening to news, the worrying new total
Number of those to whom it proved fatal
New ones only from clusters, it is pivotal
Reminding myself that no one is immortal

Only excitement is coming from the road
Bread, dairy, fish, grocery, choice is broad
Vendors welcome though enough on board
With bad days ahead, just buying to hoard

Those feeling powerful, brought down on knees
Trying to reach the peak, slipping down on grease
Wealth, power and freedom now in deep freeze
Blown away like dust, it was an invisible breeze.

Punished for past sins may not be a fallacy
Looking for divine help, pleading for mercy
How some predicted, with pinpoint accuracy
Is it a man-made virus, a misfired conspiracy?

Hidden behind masks we are moving around
Still feeling unsafe until a remedy is found
Though news of vaccines very much abound
To overcome COVID, must break new ground.

Escaping the trap where we are badly caught
Making a new beginning, starting from naught
Not back to old ways, where danger is fraught
Preserve nature with respect, we've been taught.

Sarath Gamini De Silva

29.04.2020

Back to the Nature

Overnight the world as we knew
 Changed to a different one; totally new
 Everyone was stuck inside their houses
 With curfews and lockdowns; busy with their
 browses

Nevertheless, the nature continued,
 With dawns, dusks and starlit nights.
 Rain drops fell on grass fields,
 And the grass grew greener and greener.
 Birds sang and the butterflies fluttered,
 Making the red roses bloom in eager.

I wondered in to the garden
 And was stuck by the beauty of flowers.
 The bees were a busy lot, as always
 Attending to research with all their powers.

Taking samples from each flower
 Without harming the vulnerable anthers
 Collecting nectar with utmost care
 Pooling them in hives for everyone to share

After analysing the floral data;
 Which flower blooms & which way to reach;
 Disseminating it among the members,
 So that the entire race benefits

Myriads of bird songs heard in the trees,
 Cuckoos, Orioles, King Fishers and Magpies.
 Everyone is playing a role; taking part in the
 concert
 Hiding from the Brahminy Kites, soaring the
 higher skies.

Squirrels running on the jam tree branches,
 With cheerful squeaks and playful turns.
 Taste of red ripe tiny jam fruits,
 Brought nostalgic memories and childhood
 yearns.

Suddenly the peaceful scene took a turn
 As the neighbour's cat appeared on the wall
 Birds and squirrels reacted at once,
 In unison there was an alarm call

"Togetherness and unity wins the challenge"
 Quotes the Nature's Book of Knowledge.

Taking the path to my vegetable bed, amidst
 the tweets,
 I was delighted to see the sprouting leeks
 Not to get discouraged when things go wrong,
 But to sprout again from the severed ends.
 To rise and give some hope to the world,
 Yet another lesson the nature extends.

So many lessons from Mother Nature,
 Inspirations & gleeful thoughts; like Daffodils to
 Wordsworth
 So much we have forgotten; but it really holds
 our future
 It is a golden glimpse, back to the Nature.

Madhuwanthi Dissanayake

03.05.2020,
 Colombo, Sri Lanka

Notices



**MEDIVISION
2020**
Medical Exhibition
The Glory of a Medical School
150TH
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF
COLOMBO MEDICAL FACULTY

POSTPONED

MediVision 2020 which was scheduled from 30th March 2020 is postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The new date will be informed in due course

This is your Newsletter

Do you have an interesting story or anecdote from your time at the Faculty of Medicine, Colombo? We would love to hear from you and share it with our membership. Please send your contributions to the editors at comsaa2011@gmail.com.



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