



COMSAA NEWSLETTER



CoMSAA Executive Committee 2019/2020

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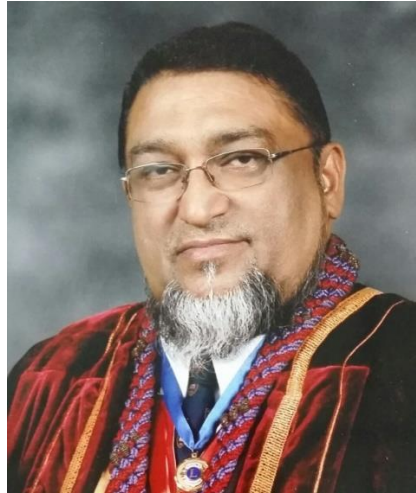
Co-opted Members

Deshamanya Professor A.H. Sheriffdeen
Professor Athula Kaluarachchi
Dr. Lasantha Malavige
Dr. Shanthilal de Silva

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President's Message – Year 2019/2020



It is with a sad frame of mind I pass a few lines for this second newsletter of COMSAA.

The first half of the year was thrilling and exciting with our COMSAA co-hosting the 150 year congress and camaraderie with our alumni near and far.

The Covid 19 late first phase and second wave made us stay at home and Zoom our deliberations. We made all preparation for the Annual Reunion and Anniversary Souvenir we had to call it off after tickets were sold. Premila and Secretaries put in a lot of effort wasted.

There were problems collecting the necessary scholarship because of the economic situation associated with Covid – 19.

The Dean Faculty made two requests to digitize the office for better functionality. We gave a donation of 10 computers from our funds in September 2020.

In Oct 2020, an urgent loan of Rs. 440,000/- was granted to the faculty for urgent supply of personal protection equipment to students starting professorial clinical training. Dean has promised to replace this money.

So, our last event is the AGM planned for November which I hope will be a face to face event. We hope to hand over the responsibility to Dr. Prasad Katulanda and wish him a better year.

May I take this opportunity to thank all councilors, our secretaries, treasurer, editors and Dean for all the support given. I wish you the best for the forthcoming season.

Thank you

Rezvi Sheriff

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

*By Prof. Hemali Goonasekera and Dr. Sumudu Suranadee
Co-secretaries/ CoMSAA – 2019/2020*

A summary of CoMSAA activities for the second part of the year is given below. Due to the Covid-19 situation in Sri Lanka, regretfully we were unable to conduct activities planned for the latter part of the year including the 150th Anniversary Walk, Quiz, and the eagerly awaited Annual Academic Sessions and Reunion.

150th Anniversary Celebrations: The official birthday of the Faculty fell on June 1, 2020. The CoMSAA President and the Executive Committee at its meeting held in May (which was a historic meeting, as it was the beginning of hybrid Executive Committee meetings which followed, due to the Covid-19 Pandemic) unanimously agreed and made plans to celebrate this momentous event of the Faculty in collaboration with the Dean and Staff of the Faculty. The main event of the day was held in the morning at the Faculty quadrangle. The number attending the event had to be limited in order to adhere to the prevailing health guidelines at the time. The Chief Guest, the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka Hon. Gotabaya Rajapaska was unable to physically attend the meeting and sent a congratulatory message to the Colombo Medical Faculty, which was read out by Hon. (Dr.) Bandula Gunawardana the Minister of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation. The distinguished invitees included, Hon. (Mrs.) Pavithra Wanniarachchi, the Minister of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine, Dr. Anil Jasinghe, Director General Health Services, Senior Professor Sampath Amaratunge, Chairman University Grants Commission, Professor Indika Karunathilake, President of the Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA), Secretaries of the Ministries of Health and Education, and Directors of the Colombo Group of Hospitals. The Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo (UoC) Professor Chandrika N. Wijeyaratne, the newly elected Faculty Dean Vidya Jyothi Professor Vajira Dissanayake, immediate-past Dean, Professor Jennifer Perera, President CoMSAA Vidya Jyothi Professor Rezvi Sheriff and President Elect CoMSAA Vidya Jyothi Dr. Prasad Katulanda presided over the ceremonial events of the morning with Chair/Senior Professors and Heads of Departments of the Faculty, Deans/Directors from other Faculties of the UoC, Senior administrative staff of the Faculty and UoC, and representatives from the non-academic staff and students societies in attendance. The President CoMSAA welcomed the gathering to the historic event and the Former and Current Faculty Deans, the Vice-chancellor, the President CoMSAA and the Hon. Ministers delivered their speeches. In keeping with previous traditions of the Faculty, a Na sapling was planted in the quadrangle to mark this historic occasion. A 150th Anniversary publication “Colombo Medical School at 150: Celebrating Our Heritage” was presented to the invitees. The

CoMSAA President-Elect proposed the vote of thanks and the gathering made its way to the student common area for the cutting of the cake made to celebrate the 150th birthday of the Faculty; which was organised by CoMSAA, followed by refreshments. A pictorial account of the proceedings of the morning celebrations are given below, more pictures are available in the CoMSAA website. A design created by the faculty IT department was used as the theme on the birthday cake as well as CoMSAA website home page.



Start of the proceedings



Lighting the traditional oil lamp



Address by the CoMSAA President



Planting of the symbolic Na sapling



Message from. Hon. President of Sri Lanka being delivered



The Anniversary Volume being presented



Faculty teachers in the audience



The Faculty Birthday cake

The second celebratory event which was an international virtual conference titled “Colombo Medical School celebrating 150 years of Excellence in Medical Education’ was held in the evening in the Medical Faculty Premises. The event was organised by the Colombo Medical Faculty in Collaboration with the SLMA and CoMSAA. The conference moderators were the Vice Chancellor UoC and the Dean of the Faculty and the SLMA and CoMSAA Presidents. Past Faculty Deans, Senior and Chair professors and Department Heads were in attendance on site and over 500 local and overseas alumni from all continents of the globe joined the proceedings, which was live streamed on YouTube and Facebook. Ten overseas alumni who have excelled in their respective fields in medicine, nostalgically recalled their days in the Colombo Medical Faculty and informed the audience how its education and the collaborations made during their days in the Faculty molded and helped them to achieve excellence in their chosen careers. An Alumnus from Bhutan also spoke about the impact the Colombo Medical Faculty education has made in their country. A collection of historic documents originating from 1870 - 1960, compiled by Emeritus Professor Laal Jayakody was also presented at the start of the conference.

To conclude the day’s celebrations, CoMSAA made arrangements to illuminate the main building and the Faculty clock tower. The attractive picture of the illuminated building and clock tower was posted on the CoMSAA Facebook page and the post reached 14,000 people and was shared by 140.

In celebration of the 150th Anniversary, CoMSAA introduced a Facebook frame to alumni and students, which went viral. A membership drive to commemorate the Faculty birthday was also launched and the members who obtained their membership on this ceremonious day are included below.

CoMSAA Memberships and Online membership payment gateway: CoMSAA welcomed 77 new members during the year. Alumni can now obtain membership online by filling the membership form and paying the lifetime membership fee via the payment gateway created in the CoMSAA website. Work related to the payment gateway was initiated by the previous CoMSAA Executive Committee, and was completed this year. Its official launch took place on the day of the 98th Executive Committee meeting by the current President CoMSAA. Dr. Sahan Guruge, past treasurer was also invited to attend the occasion. The recently graduated alumnus Dr. Wasana Kodithuwakku was also invited to obtain the first CoMSAA Lifetime membership online.



President CoMSAA inaugurating the payment gateway



Dr. Kodithuwakku filling the membership application online

Student financial assistance scheme: The traditional CoMSAA student Scholarship schemes and the Batch of 75, stethoscope donation scheme continued this year. The Mosvold Martinus Foundation scholarship scheme ended after one year due to lack of funds.

CoMSAA Donations to the Faculty: The CoMSAA donated ten laptop computers worth Rs. 860,000.00 to the Faculty digitalization Project initiated by the newly elected Dean Professor Vajira Dissanayake. The President CoMSAA handed over the laptop computers to the Dean during the 98th Executive Committee meeting. The Dean thanked the CoMSAA for its magnanimous gesture and said that they served a greatly felt need in the Covid-19 era of the Faculty.



President CoMSAA presenting the Laptop computers to the Faculty Dean



The Faculty Dean speaking at the occasion

CoMSAA Annual Academic Sessions and Reunion: In view of the Covid-19 pandemic the activities of the annual event was planned for half a day at the Royal Palms Beach Hotel Kalutara on October 17, 2020 with the overseas members joining online. It had to be cancelled at short notice due to the starting of the second wave of Covid-19 in the country. Professor Jennifer Perera accepted the CoMSAA invitation to be the chief guest and we deeply appreciate the gesture. Three talks were planned by Dr. Jaika Withana ('How training in visual arts would contribute to Medical Education'), Prof. Dinithi Fernando (The extraordinary case of a misshapen jaw shaping a culture of music: a glimpse into a revolutionary era of the history of Sinhala song and musical theatre') and Professor Ranil Fernando ('From serendipity to evidence based medicine'); which would have been excellent talks to listen to. The debating team members Dr. Ishan de Zoysa, Dr. Neomali Amarasena, Prof. Indika Karunathilake and Prof. Manju Weerasinghe accepted our invitation to debate on the current pertinent topic - What we had before was better than the "Post COVID New Normal". Dr. Jaika Witana also created a very creative cover page for the programme book in consultation with the Executive Committee and also suggested a quiz question and an attractive prize for its winner. We thank them all profoundly and also the dynamic organizing team lead by Dr. Pramilla Senanayake for all their hard work and valuable time spent on the matters related to the event and our Editors for making arrangements to print hard copies of the programme book by the Colombo University Press, University of Colombo.

CoMSAA Constitution amendments: A Four member committee consisting of Deshamanya Professor Sheriffdeen, Dr. Sarath Gamini De Silva, and the current President and President Elect, was appointed by the Executive Committee to peruse and suggest amendments to the constitution especially article XVI. The final Executive Committee approved amendments were circulated to the membership, for comments and further corrections if necessary, and will be presented at the Annual General Meeting for approval by the membership.

CoMSAA Newsletter: Both Editors Professor Nirmala Wijekoon and Dr. Dineshani Sirisena planned and put out the two newsletters on time and we greatly appreciate their commitment. We also thank all the authors for their creative contributions.

CoMSAA Website: The CoMSAA membership was kept informed of all the planned CoMSAA events and activities through the CoMSAA website. We constantly strived to update the website with latest news and events with the help of the team at Designsolv (Pvt) Ltd. the company which maintains the CoMSAA website. A collection of flyers including the 150th Anniversary design created by the IT team and the Facebook frame are depicted below.



It was a pleasure and a privilege for us to have been the co-secretaries to our President Vidya Jyothi Professor Rezvi Sheriff and the Executive Committee during the past year. We thank them all for their guidance and support given to us at all times to carry out the CoMSAA activities. We thank the Executive Committee members for attending the Executive Committee meetings in person, despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The 98th Executive Committee meeting held with social distancing at the Faculty Board Room is shown below.



We also wish to thank both the present and former Deans of the Faculty of Medicine, Vidya Jyothi Professor Vajira H. W. Dissanayake and Professor Jennifer Perera, respectively for the great support given at all times to CoMSAA initiated activities during our tenure of work. We also gratefully acknowledge the support extended by the Dean's office staff, two non-academic staff Mr. Ajith and Mr. Nazeel Mohammed and non-academic staff in the Departments of Microbiology and Anatomy, IT support given by the IT Department especially Dr. Roshan and Mr. Sarath and his team at the A-V unit. We thank and wish the very best of luck to our CoMSAA demonstrator Ms. Mass Zainab Yusuf who unfailingly gave us support in all our activities thought the year and congratulate her on her excellent designing work; she created the designs for the CoMSAA stall at the Colombo Medical Congress, all the event flyers, posters, ticket book design and the Facebook frame. Ms. Yusuf is seen with the President and the Executive Committee in the picture below.



Last but not least we wish to thank our Alumni for their great enthusiasm and unstinted support given to CoMSAA in all its endeavors and we wish them the very best of luck and best of health!

Members who became Lifetime CoMSAA members on June 1, 2020 are as follows:

1. Dr. E.A.D. Mihiranga
2. Dr. E.A.R.B.D. Somarathna
3. Dr. Miyuru Avinda Weeraratne
4. Dr. Pasindu Zoysa
5. Dr. R.S.P.K. Lakmal
6. Dr. S.R. Tennakoon
7. Dr. Vidarsha Rajini
8. Dr. P.A.E.S. Kumarasiri
9. Dr. G.D. Gayasha
10. Dr. Rani Fernando
11. Dr. Clifford Perera
12. Dr. D.N. Piyarthna Udahaolage

News from our students

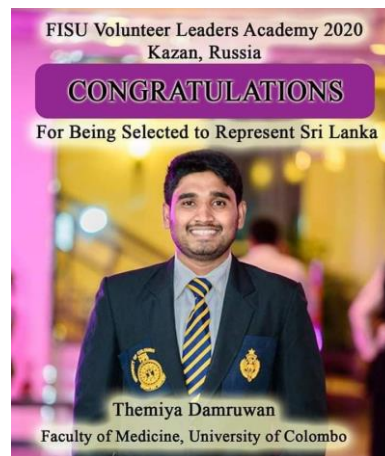
Medical undergraduates coming to the forefront amidst the pandemic

Even though the physical presence of students in the faculty was restricted to a great extent due to the prevalent pandemic situation in the country, this provided a new dimension of activities to surface based on online digital platforms. This paved the way for students to bring about various innovative ideas to a digital platform reaching a greater audience than what they normally present in the faculty.

Students' Achievements

Thilina Perera of 2015 A/L batch and Hiruna Wickramasinghe of 2018 A/L batch of Faculty of Medicine were selected (ranking 11th and 13th respectively at local selections conducted by SLUSA) for World University Mind Sports Championships 2020, Poland.

Themiyas Damruwan of 2014 A/L batch was selected by SLUSA (Sri Lanka Universities Sports Association) as one of the two student representatives of Sri Lanka for FISU (International University Sports Federation) Volunteer Leaders Academy 2020 which was supposed to be held in Kazan, Russia but was conducted virtually due to current situation. Subsequently he was appointed as the FISU Student Ambassador for Sri Lanka (2020/2021). The previous FISU Student Ambassador for Sri Lanka (2019/2020) was also from our faculty, Akhila Nilaweera of 2014 A/L batch, and he was recognized by FISU as one of the most active student ambassadors of the world and thereby selected as a Team Leader for this year programme.



Projects and Events related to COVID-19 epidemic

▪ Medical Students' Platform to Educate the Community (MedSPEC)

MedSPEC provided daily updates of the situation-both local and global data, conducted health promotion and myth busting and published several stories regarding topics related to COVID-19, through Facebook.

▪ COVID-19 Prevention Task Force call centre activities

Under the coordination of Medical Faculty Students' Action Committee, students got involved in the National COVID-19 Prevention Task Force call centre activities. The call centre activities were resumed in the latter part of the year at the Disaster Preparedness and Response Division of Ministry of Health under the supervision of Dr. Novil Wijesekara. All activities were conducted with maximum precautions and health measures, under total voluntary basis.



▪ Webinar on COVID-19

MFSU/MSWS was able to hold a Zoom Webinar for the Faculty students to educate them about the COVID-19 situation. Staff members from various departments including Microbiology, Pharmacology, Community Medicine and Medical Education participated as resource persons.

▪ Provision of laptops to students



There were sudden changes in the mode of teaching-learning activities held by the faculty as physical lectures were no longer possible with the restriction in place. Thereby, the MFSU/MSWS in collaboration with several well-wishers were able to donate 10 laptops to selected students from all batches based on an unbiased method, as an effort to facilitate the effective continuation of their academic activities.

▪ Project 'She Deserves Better'

With COVID-19 on the rise, island-wide curfew was in action to flatten the curve, however this resulted in an escalation of violence against women being reported all over Sri Lanka. The project titled "She Deserves Better" was a social awareness campaign, addressing this issue. Various social media platforms were used to disseminate a series of creative posts and videos in Sinhala, Tamil and English, designed by the Golden Z Club, under the guidance of its academic advisor, Prof Piyanjali de Zoysa (Professor in the Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, Colombo).

▪ Break the Outbreak – COVID Talks

COVID Talks was the first phase of a three-phase project 'Break the Outbreak' the organized by the Rotaract Club of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo under the Rotaract District initiative Stop the Spread. It was a virtually held webinar, successfully done on the 9th of August, 2020 with over 200 participants.

From the Editors

Critical thinking

Prof. Nirmala Wijekoon

Critical thinking is rational, skeptical, unbiased analysis of factual evidence to form a judgement. Commitment to overcome egocentrism and sociocentrism is an integral part of it. The earliest records of critical thinking are the teachings of Socrates recorded by Plato. Critical thinking is aimed at achieving the best possible outcomes in any situation in life. In an era when people are bombarded with information, critical thinking becomes an essential skill.

Critical thinking is an important element of all professional fields and academic disciplines. Those with critical thinking skills become more independent, self-directed learners. They have the comprehensive skills to consider all possible options and solve a problem. The ability to make rational, unbiased and informed decisions is an important asset in any field of work. It becomes an essential skill for the successful execution of responsibilities in fields like medicine, law, education, research, finance and administration.

Applying critical thinking is important for success in personal life too. It helps one make correct decisions in day to day life as well as when it comes to a life-changing event that requires a lot of thought. Critical thinking helps to change an individual's situation in a positive manner which in turn promotes personal growth and overall satisfaction in life. One learns to control reactive behaviour and to develop empathy for other points of view when they learn to think critically. It is good for healthy interpersonal relationships.

Critical Thinking is the foundation of a liberal democratic society. The proper functioning of a liberal democracy requires citizens who can think critically and are in a position to inform their judgments about proper governance. Critical thinkers are required to overcome biases and prejudice existing in the society.

The ability to think critically is more important now than it has ever been. If people cannot think critically, it not only lessens the prospects of personal success but also makes them easy targets for fraud and manipulation. A good critical thinker knows how to separate facts from opinions and beliefs, how to examine an issue from all sides, how to withhold personal judgment or biases and how to make rational inferences. Critical thinkers become the voice of reason in times of crisis.

At this hour when the whole world is almost exhausted in their attempt to curtail COVID-19, critical thinkers have a crucial role to play.

Strong critical thinkers demonstrate the following characteristics. See whether you qualify as a critical thinker.

- inquisitiveness with regard to a wide range of issues
- concern to become and remain well-informed
- attentive to opportunities to use critical thinking
- self-confidence in one's own abilities to reason
- open-mindedness regarding divergent world views
- flexibility in considering alternatives and opinions
- alertness to likely future events in order to anticipate their consequences
- understanding of the opinions of other people
- fair-mindedness in appraising reasoning
- honesty in facing one's own biases, prejudices, stereotypes, or egocentric tendencies
- prudence in suspending, making or altering judgments
 - willingness to reconsider and revise views where honest reflection suggests that change is warranted

Facione PA and Insight Assessment. Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction. Executive Summary, American Philosophical Association Delphi Research Report 1990 <https://www.insightassessment.com/wp-content/uploads/DEX-2014-reprinting.pdf> Accessed 28 October 2020

Members' Corner

Don't lock me out

Lock me in, lock me down
But please don't lock me out
I fumble, I gamble all I own
I plead, I bleed, to not to be out

For I am asleep, dreams are sweet
I dance to your rhythmic heartbeat
Warm, protected, what of I weep
I know not, care not, when I sleep

Out in the dark, this cold night
Like a firefly, lost outside
Powerless, I'm drawn to the light
Naked, burnt, terrified inside

Left abandoned, no one to own
I cannot, I will not be cast out
So lock me in, lock me down
But please, don't lock me out

Different I am, that I know.
But a sin? A crime? I think not.
Forces hurl me, but I do not bow.
I know my strength; I stand my ground.

Dedicated to all the misfits, the cast aways and the mavericks

Chiranthi K. Liyanage

PARASITOLOGY VIVA VOCE – 1968

As of now, it seems to have been ages ago. Sometime in 1968, our Parasitology *viva voce* of 3rd MB was on. That fabulous doyen of Parasitology, Professor A. S. Dissanayake was my examiner. The *viva* seemed to be going well and with a bang. I actually managed to answer most of the questions. He even asked me about the exact placement of the spikes in the eggs of different species of *schistosoma* and I was able to draw and show him. He appeared to be quite pleased.

Towards the end, the good Professor picked up a tiny mosquito mounted in a transparent little bottle and wanted me to identify it. My heart sank. This was the one thing I dreaded. I was quite hopeless at identifying mosquitoes. In fact, even now I am no good at it.

I thought he must have picked up a really rare one and I said "*Culex pipiens, Sir*". He said "*no*". Then I said "*Anopheles stephensi, Sir*". He said "*no*". Then I thought it must be a commoner one and said "*Aedes albopictus, Sir*". He said "*no*". Then I said "*Anopheles culicifacies, Sir*". He said "*no*". Then I said "*Culex fatigans, Sir*". Again he said "*no*".

Then I said "*Aedes aegypti, Sir*". He smiled broadly and said "*Bravo, hooray, dead right. In fact that is the only one left of all the mosquitoes that we have taught you about. You can go now*".

Surprise, SURPRISE..., I actually passed that time!!!!!! Must have been because of my prowess with the *Schistosoma* eggs!!!!

Dr. B. J. C. Perera

Specialist Consultant Paediatrician

A THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUOTE FROM LEO TOLSTOY, THE RUSSIAN WRITER ACKNOWLEDGED TO HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE GREATS OF ALL TIME.

"The doctors treated him, let out his blood and gave him medicine to drink. He nevertheless recovered."

The morale of this quip is that patients would recover, not always because of us, but sometimes even in spite of us.

Dr B. J. C. Perera

Specialist Consultant Paediatrician

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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Dr. Dineshani Hettiarachchi