

PeMSAA Newsletter

Peradeniya Medical School Alumni Association

September 2021



Committee 2021/ 22

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A Long Wait.....

The dark and deserted corridors yearn for the young and chirpy owners who frequent them, day and night. The deafening silence emanating from the lecture halls, once a mecca of disseminating knowledge leaves a heavy tone in one's heart. The wards, devoid of its rightful owners in white coats, who, for generations didn't even think of absconding under the hawk eyes of their clinicians, are nowhere to be found. The emaciated dog friends, with their yearning eyes, seeks where their owners have gone suddenly, not a crumb is found in the canteen.

A virus, not even considered a living being has brought the mighty Homo sapiens, to its knees. Our alma mater, awaits....so as the whole world.

It was in late 2019, that the first indications of an unknown respiratory illness, in the form of a pneumonia was causing concern in the Wuhan province in China. As 2020 dawned, it was clear that we were dealing with a new virus, belonging to the "Corona" virus group, more specifically a Beta Corona virus, named because of its peculiar appearance of a crown, in the electron microscopic images. The virus was not totally unfamiliar to us.

Corona viruses, that only caused mild respiratory illnesses in the majority of the immunocompetent population, was not in the limelight until 2002. This virus, commonly found in nature in bats, started to show its true pathogenic potential in humans during the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic. It demonstrated its potential as a deadly pathogen with a 10% mortality rate. Furthermore, it infected about 8000 people, displaying that it was contagious as well. The SARS epidemic, caused by the virus that was later baptized as SARS Co-V, challenged the diagnostic modalities and infection control measures that were available at that time.

It was a proud product of our Alma mater that spearheaded the challenge of identifying the etiology and the natural course of this deadly disease. The methods that were developed were the main reason that, when in 2012, another unknown illness emerged in the Middle East, the pathogen was identified without significant delay. The MERS (Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome), demonstrated that the pathogenic ability of the Corona viruses was not just random. A fatality rate of 30%, with 2400 people being infected, caused concern about the true potential and the magnitude of the effect it could have on the normal functioning of the human society.

But, in the wildest imagination of a person, except in the mind of, Scott.Z.Burns, the script writer of the 2011, movie "Contagion", we wouldn't have thought that it would come to this.

Thousands of planes were grounded, the restaurants deserted, and popular tourist attractions had only the wild life to admire them. Children, for the first time in their lives were asked to stay home and to avoid school. The workaholics had to be content with working from home. A friendly visit to a neighbour was frowned upon. The light banter of friends sitting around a table was no more. There were no hugs to comfort, when comfort was needed most.

The economies of the strongest nations in the world collapsed. They had the armamentarium to withstand any potential threat, but they were impotent, not being able to contain their citizens succumbing and their health care systems struggling.

Being a pathogen that was easily disseminated by the respiratory route, the measures that needed to be implemented to curtail the spread was drastic. Social distancing was the mantra that was muttered. The importance of hand hygiene was practically engraved. Wearing masks by the general public provoked controversy, sometimes resulting in confusion. But with much persuasion, the "experts" were able to look beyond what was written in guidelines, and sanity prevailed. The importance of having experts who could generate feasible guidance that could be practically implemented, according to the local situation was demonstrated more than once.

The Clinical Virologists, with the untiring efforts made available the diagnostics that were needed, rapidly earlier than many neighbouring countries. The Microbiologists devised practical and useful guidance to the measures that should be implemented and also the pot holes that should be avoided. The clinicians, Pulmonologists, Anaesthetists, Internal Medicine Critical care and Emergency care specialists faced with a challenge that had more questions than answers, flocked together to approach this daunting endeavour in a Multi-disciplinary manner. The approach of the community health care teams lead by the Community Physicians and Epidemiologists aptly helped by the intelligence officers and law enforcement arms, should be lauded. It helped immensely to mitigate the community spread and halt the spread in its tracks.

The establishment of clear guidelines on quarantine and establishment of quarantine centres, followed guiding the mitigation process further.

We, as a country were able to face wave by wave, through this collective effort. Even when we are now faced with the severest of waves, we are facing the challenge together, commendably.

In the fore front are our alumni, both nationally and internationally, from the Director General of Health Services, to the Intern Medical officers, battling in many fronts, keeping our people safe. The sacrifices are immense. Some had not slept soundly for many days, not visited their dear families for weeks, and were working under tremendous stress in suboptimal working conditions.

As a proud graduate of our Alma mater, I am moved by the attitude, courage and leadership shown by our fellow colleagues, working hand in hand with like-minded professionals from various spheres of specialties. Together we will prevail.

I am eagerly looking forward to the day when the corridors will be filled with laughter, the lecture halls will gleam with enthusiastic eyes, and the innocent dog friends will meet their rightful masters....

I pray that our next generation will be able to re-commence the journey they began in the bosom of our Alma mater, to become astute clinicians and leaders, equipped with knowledge, skills and attitudes who are able to face and conquer any challenge the future might pose.

We will be challenged, again and again, and of that, I am certain.

Dr. Neranjan Dissanayake

MBBS (Peradeniya), MD (Medicine), MRCP(UK), FCCP (SL), FRCP (London)

Consultant Pulmonologist: 1995/96 Batch



Achievements of Our Alumni

Future Science Prize - "Chinese Nobel Prize" 2021

An outstanding Peradeniya Medical School alumnus Professor Sriyal Malik Peiris was honoured by the 2021 Future Science Prize, dubbed "China's Nobel Prize" for his invaluable scientific contribution towards establishing the SARS-CoV-1 as the causative virus for the global SARS outbreak in 2003. The Future Science Prize is a privately funded science award established in 2016, aiming at recognising scientific breakthroughs in China with long-term global significance. The prize is given in three categories with \$1 million for each award, namely the Life Science Prize, Physical Science Prize and Mathematics and Computer Science Prize.

The nomination and selection of the Future Science Prize was established in accordance with the Nobel Prize system. The committee invites international experts as nominators and then solicits evaluation letters from experts in relevant fields of the nominated work. Based on the evaluations, the committee then votes to select the final award winners.

Professor Peiris was researching on ecology, evolution, pathogenesis, and epidemiology of animal-human influenza and other human respiratory viral infections over the past 4 decades. He is an author of over 320 research publications in prestigious scientific journals. Professor Peiris is most notable for being the first scientist to isolate the SARS virus. In addition, his research has provided understanding on the emergence and pathogenesis of the 2009 H1N1 virus pandemic and on avian influenza viruses H5N1, H9N2 and H7N9. His collaborative research has provided evidence-based options for the control of these viruses in poultry and in humans. Prof. Peiris in 2003, played a key role in the discovery of the novel coronavirus causing of SARS, its diagnosis and pathogenesis.

Professor Peiris was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of London in 2006. He is the recipient of the Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur, France (2007), Mahathir Science Award, Akademi Sains, Malaysia (2007) and Silver Bauhinia Star (S.B.S.), Hong Kong (2008). He serves on the editorial boards of Lancet Infectious Diseases and PLoS Medicine.



Novel technique for thermal ablation of tumours: Microwave ablation

We are proud to announce a new technique introduced to Peradeniya by two of our alumni, Dr. Jeevani Udupihille (1996./97 batch) and Dr. Kumari Pussepitiya, (1985/86 batch) the thermal Microwave ablation of tumours.

Image guided thermal ablation of tumours has become very popular in modern medical practice, its main advantage being minimally invasive. Microwave ablation is a novel technique among the minimally invasive treatments for tumours.

Dr Jeevani Udupihille, Senior Lecturer, Department of Radiology has played the main role in bringing this facility to our door step. After a short training at Beijing Friendship Hospital in China, Dr Udupihille and Dr Kumari Pussepitiya Consultant Radiologist, have established this service at the Teaching Hospital, Peradeniya (THP). Currently the technique is used for liver malignancies and benign breast lesions (fibroadenomas). Dr Udupihille plans to use this technique for the ablation of benign thyroid nodules as well.

THP is one of only three institutions where this procedure is done, the others being National Hospital of Sri Lanka, Colombo and Sri Jayewardenepura Hospital. The other advantages of imaging-guided ablative therapies compared to traditional cancer treatments include reduced morbidity and mortality, lower procedural cost, suitability for real-time imaging guidance, the ability to perform ablations in an outpatient setting synergy with other cancer treatments and repeatability. It can be used on patients who are unfit for general anaesthesia required for major surgeries as thermal ablations are usually done under local anaesthesia with conscious sedation.



Achievements of Our Alumni

Dr Nuwan Thotawaththa: A poet and a children's literature writer

Dr Nuwan Thotawaththa is a Peradeniya Medical Faculty alumnus from the 2002/03 batch. He is a poet and a translator with a special interest in children's literature. He has compiled five poetry collections including සඳ එළිය සහ දිය සිඳි වීල, ප්‍රදීපාගාරයක හිඳ, හිඹිපෙන පාමුල, ඵලසියරයක ප්‍රේමය and අකීකරු බිනිදොර. He is the author ten widely sold non-fiction children's books including බඩ ඇතුළුව සවාරියක්, කැප්ටන් මාස්ක්, දේදුන්නට තටු ඇවිදින්න, හුස්ම ගන්න හැටි බලන්න and කන ඇතුළුව ගමනක්. Dr Thotawaththa's intention is to educate the young generation with the necessary knowledge of health and it is well evidenced by the books පැණිරස ගැන රස කතා, පුවේ කොවී and මගේ ඇඟ මගේ. Dr Thotawaththa started his children's literary career by writing his first book "මට දැන් සනීපයි" under the supervision of Prof. Chandra Abeysekera for the Department of Paediatrics, Faculty of Medicine Peradeniya. He was nominated twice for the national literature award for the best poetry collection and for the state music award for the best lyricist in the children's song category.



In addition, Dr Thotawaththa is interested in wildlife photography and has a sound knowledge of Butterflies of Sri Lanka having being trained by Dr Michael van der Poorten, a famous butterfly specialist in Sri Lanka. Dr Thotawaththa is a Medical officer by profession and holds a Master's degree in the field of Community Medicine. He is currently reading for his doctoral degree in Community Medicine at present. Currently, he is serving the Ministry of Health as the Regional Epidemiologist, Matale district.



Professor Vasanthi Pinto - The new Dean of the Peradeniya Medical Faculty

Professor Vasanthi Pinto was appointed as the Dean Faculty of Medicine University of Peradeniya on 10th September 2021. She is the first lady alumnus of the Peradeniya Medical School to hold this prestigious post and is from the 1984/85 batch. Professor Pinto is the 19th Dean of the Peradeniya Medical Faculty. She is the Chair Professor of Anaesthesiology and Critical Care, Faculty of Medicine Peradeniya. Professor Pinto was the President of PeMSAA 2019/2020 and initiated "My Batch with our PeMSAA " and led the 15th International Medical Congress organised by PeMSAA. The PeMSAA wishes her every success.



My BATCH with our PeMSAA

“My Batch with our PeMSAA” webinar series started in 2019 was the brain child of Professor Vasanthi Pinto, the President PeMSAA 2019/2020 and it was the perfect solution for the dissemination and sharing of scientific knowledge and expertise during the COVID-19 pandemic which prevented the hosting of any type of physical forum.

“My Batch with our PeMSAA” webinars provided a common interactive platform for alumni spread across the world. Five batch webinars were held during the year 2020 and more batches are lined up to have their own in time to come.

The last two webinars were organised by the 1991/92 batch under the titled “Kicked to Fifties and Beyond Sixties: A healers journey” and by the 1987/88 batch titled “Covid-19: The less talked about aspects”.



PeMSAA Evening Talks & Case Based Discussions

PeMSAA has started a series of lectures - the “PeMSAA Evening Talks” by Alumni to uplift the knowledge among medical students through the online platform zoom. Staff members of the faculty and alumni specialised in different fields actively contribute to this teaching programme. Three evening talks have been organised every week and the programme has been a great success. The student participation has been around 400 - 500 with highly enthusiastic discussion. PeMSAA expresses its sincere gratitude to the following academics and clinicians who actively contributed to the “PeMSAA evening. talks”.

- Dr Sampath Herath [1996/97] - Paediatric Surgical Emergencies (non-traumatic)
- Dr Anuradha Ellepola [1997/98] - Schizophrenia
- Dr Janaka Jayasinghe [1996/97] - Infections in Pregnancy
- Dr Premil Rajakrishna [1997/98] - Clinical Approach to a Patient with Abnormal Renal Functions
- Dr Charith Galappaththi [2002/03] - Peripheral Vascular Diseases
- Dr Jagath Premadasa [1990/91] - Heart Diseases in Pregnancy
- Prof. Thushara Kudagammana [1990/91] - A child presenting with excessive crying and MCQ discussion
- Dr Chathurika Dandeniya [2003/04] - Case based discussion with MCQs
- Dr Gihan Champika [2000/01] - Case based discussion with MCQs
- Dr Uditha Bulugahapitiya [1990/91] - Case Scenarios in Diabetes
- Dr Dilini Vidusha [2006/07] - A young man presenting with voices of unseen people
- Dr Buddhika Dassanayake [2000/01] - An Anxious Man with Neck Swelling with MCQ



Regional Clinical Meeting Organised by PeMSAA

PeMSAA has started Regional Clinical Meetings to disseminate updated clinical knowledge to the regional hospitals under the theme of “Reaching out... Sharing knowledge & strengthening bonds...” The first regional clinical meeting organised by PeMSAA in collaboration with the Rathnapura Clinical Society was held on 12th September 2021. The key speech was delivered by Dr. Nieranjan Dissanayake, Consultant Pulmonologist and the President, Rathnapura Clinical Society under the titled “Covid-19: Addressing the Conundrums of the General Practitioner” and was moderated by Dr Duminda Yasaratna, Senior Lecturer and Consultant Pulmonologist, Teaching Hospital, Peradeniya.



PeMSAA Activities

Faculty Beautification and Development Programme by PeMSAA



News from Overseas PeMSAA Chapters; PeMSAA - UK

PeMSAA-UK sends the warmest greetings; I am pleased to submit a short update to the parent PeMSAA Newsletter.

We are delighted that our Autumn Webinar on *"The Role of Microbiome in Health and Disease"* by Prof Tim Spector on 18th September 2021 was another successful event. Tim is a Professor of Genetic Epidemiology and Director of the Twins UK Registry at Kings College, London. He has done extensive work on Microbiome and their nutritional and immunological benefits. We are proud that the participants of the webinar rated this as an excellent event. The recording of the webinar is available at PeMSAA-UK website (www.pemsaa.uk).

PeMSAA-UK Academic Award for 2021 for "Research, Audit and Quality Improvement Projects" was offered to undergraduates and postgraduates. We received excellent submissions from undergraduates. The local Faculty Assessment panel and the PeMSAA-UK Academic Award panel members unanimously agreed on the winners of the 2021 PeMSAA-UK Undergraduate Academic Award. Our heartiest congratulations to Ms. Umangi Wathala Karunaratne the lead Investigator and her fellow team members for their exceptional work on *"Effect Of L-Theanine On Selective Attention In A Traffic-Related Reaction Task In Sleep-Deprived Young Adults: A Double-Blind Placebo-Controlled, Crossover Study"*.

PeMSAA-UK is proud to have initiated a fund raising campaign towards establishing Genome Sequencing Service at the Microbiology Department, Faculty of Medicine. We thank Prof Kapila Gunawardana for identifying the financier, Dr Walter Jayasinghe from LA, USA contributing Rs7, 000,000.00 towards this endeavour.

Following a request from the faculty library PeMSAA-UK has collated a list of valuable books with costing. We have distributed this list among the global alumni community for their contributions towards purchasing them for the library. We are working in collaboration with parent PeMSAA in succeeding in this venture. We urge each and every one of you to support this endeavour; please contact us via membership@pemsaa.uk.

2021 PeMSAA-UK International Academic Conference, Prof Varagunam Memorial Lecture and the annual Ball, on 18th September in UK was cancelled due to the prevailing COVID-19 situation.

I have been the President of this prestigious association since the inception. We made this association a reputable, dependable and above all a friendly networking and supporting association. We brought in lots of innovative ideas worked incredibly hard to set a good foundation for this association. I am proud to have lead PeMSAA-UK since it's inauguration and it's time to hand over the baton to another enthusiastic leader Dr Padma Samarawickrama who would lead this incredible association from 18th September 2021.

I thank each and every past and present committee member of the UK and global PeMSAA and the supporting alumni in UK and abroad.

Dr. Krish T Radhakrishnan, President PeMSAA-UK (17 June 2017-18 September 2021)



Becoming a PeMSAA member

The eligibility of membership criteria would be from two main categories;

- The past graduates of the Faculty of Medicine, Peradeniya and academic staff members of the Faculty of Medicine
- All the consultants (extended staff) irrespective of their faculties, who are involved in teaching of medical students of the Faculty of Medicine, Peradeniya and at the teaching hospitals.

Details of the membership is available at: <https://www.pemsaa.org.lk/membership/how-to-become-amember.html>



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