

# PeMSAA Newsletter



Peradeniya Medical School Alumni Association

September 2022

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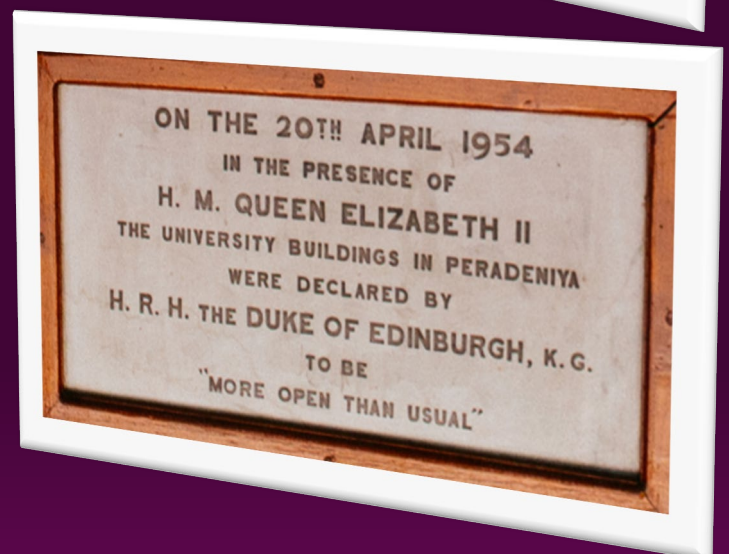
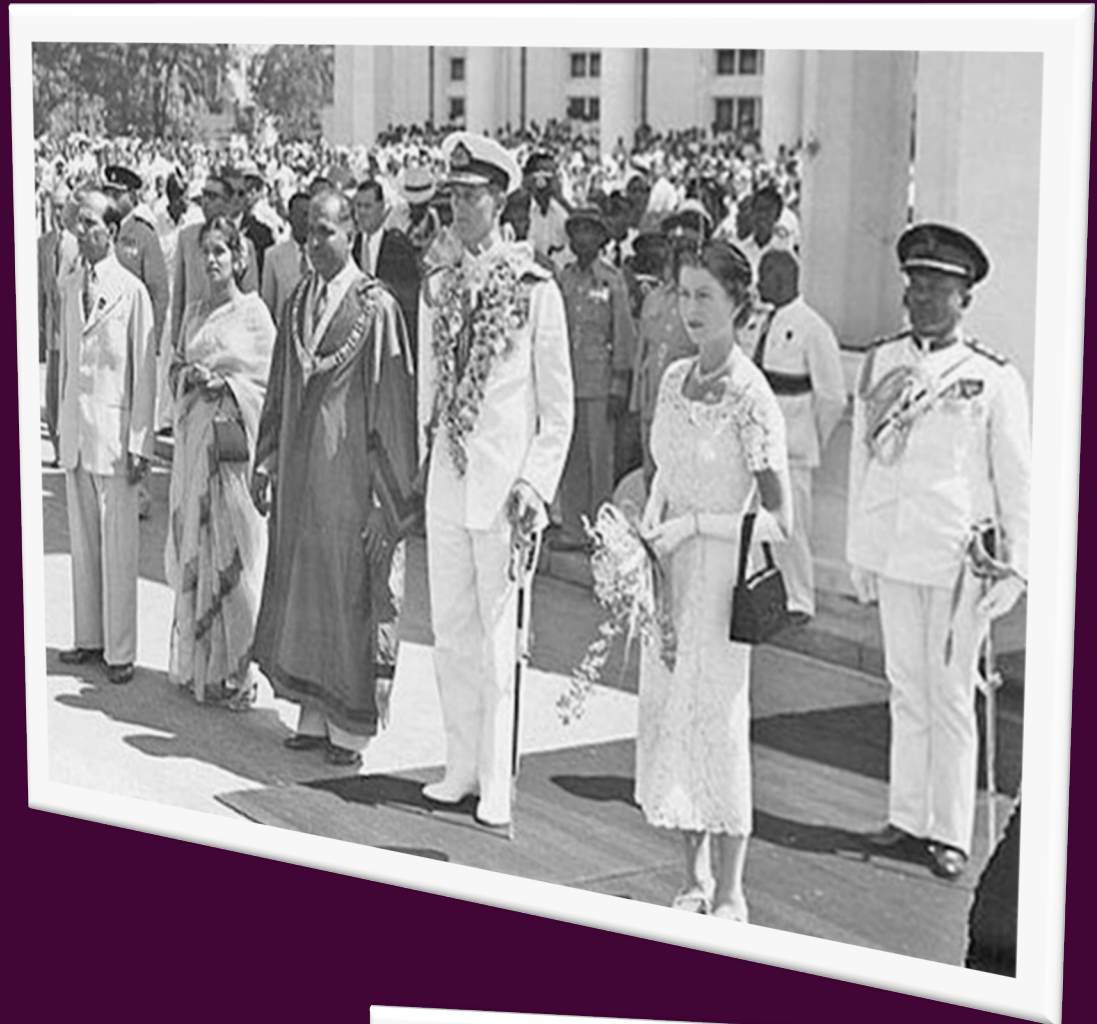
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# Changing Face of Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is the commonest inflammatory arthritis in the world. There is a female predominance with a female to male ratio of 3:1. The disease is certainly not new, being first described in 1800 by Dr. Augustin Jacob Landré-Beauvais. Even before this, there have been descriptions of the condition in literature although not as completely as by Landré-Beauvais. 'Rheumatoid' is a word with Greek origins, meaning fluid-like or flowing. The term 'arthritis', is used to denote disorders affecting joints. It is a combination of 'arthron', a Greek word for joint, and the suffix '-itis', which means inflammation. Therefore, the term literally means watery inflamed joints.

## Clinical presentation

Rheumatoid arthritis is predominantly a disease of small joints. The typical patient presents with symmetrical bilateral hand joint involvement sparing the distal interphalangeal joints. Inflammatory pain is described with inactivity stiffness. In the mornings, this stiffness may last 30 minutes or more. Other than this typical picture, any synovial joint in the body may be involved.



Although the disease has a long history, over the last two decades, how we look at rheumatoid arthritis has undergone major changes leading to a paradigm shift in diagnosis and treatment. This article discusses these new additions to our understanding of this age-old disease.

**Figure 1:** hands of a patient with deformed fingers due to poorly treated long-standing rheumatoid arthritis. These changes are irreversible even with treatment. Plastic surgery to correct the deformities is the only option to reverse.

## Pearl #1: Rheumatoid disease rather than rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is better termed 'rheumatoid disease' due to the systemic nature of the condition. Other than the joints, this condition can affect many systems and tissues with a wide range of manifestations. One such devastating effect is rheumatoid lung disease. Interstitial lung disease in rheumatoid arthritis is often blamed on DMARDs, particularly methotrexate, when actually the real culprit is untreated disease.

## Pearl #2: EORA

Although rheumatoid arthritis is commoner among middle aged females, it is being increasingly recognized among the older populations. Now there is an entity termed Elderly Onset Rheumatoid Arthritis (EORA)<sup>1</sup> which describes patients diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis beyond 70 years of age. The patient with the most advanced age at disease onset that I have treated, developed first symptoms at the age of 91 years. In these patients diagnosis and management are challenging due to atypical presentation and comorbidities.

## Pearl #3: Classification criteria

In rheumatoid arthritis, much like in many other rheumatological conditions, there are *no diagnostic criteria*. The latest available ACR/EULAR criteria<sup>2</sup> are rather for classification of clinically diagnosed cases for the purpose of research. This should be emphasized for early diagnosis to be possible. Early rheumatoid arthritis is often undifferentiated, would have normal inflammatory markers and even negative serological markers like rheumatoid factor and anti-CCP antibody. These would not exclude the diagnosis. A thorough clinical history and a detailed examination cannot be replaced by investigations in diagnosing rheumatoid arthritis early.

#### **Pearl #4: Suspect early and refer to a specialist early.**

Management of rheumatoid arthritis involves many specialist decisions. Early diagnosis, early institution of disease modifying (DMARD) treatment with proper monitoring, timely decisions on DMARD switching/stopping/adding and determination of failure of conventional DMARD therapy with need to escalation to biologic therapy are all such specialist decisions.

As a rule of thumb if a patient has any one of, small joint symptoms, at least one swollen joint or early morning stiffness of 30 minutes or more, please refer to a specialist rheumatology service at the earliest.

#### **Pearl #5: The earlier the diagnosis and initiation of treatment, the better.**

Leaving rheumatoid arthritis untreated for nature to take its course is not an attractive option. If untreated, the damage will lead to well-known rheumatoid deformities. Given hands are more commonly involved in rheumatoid arthritis, the disability is quite severe.

Recent research has clearly shown the advantages of early diagnosis and treatment of rheumatoid arthritis<sup>3</sup>. These include less disease-related morbidity in the long term, a higher chance of achieving drug-free remission and an improved quality of life. In the long run, this would lead to reduced health care burden because of reduction in disability.

#### **Pearl #6: The initial treatment of choice is methotrexate**

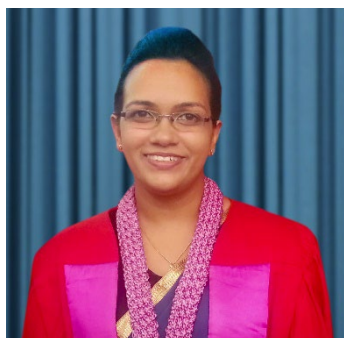
Despite several available DMARDs and new medications being added to the list, the initial recommended DMARD remains methotrexate. This is well-supported by robust evidence.<sup>3</sup> Therefore unless otherwise contraindicated, this is recommended as the first-line medication. This is relatively cheap, effective and safe as long as properly monitored. But unfortunately, this is also one of the most misunderstood and feared medications in current use, particularly in Sri Lanka.

#### **Key messages:**

- Rheumatoid arthritis is a systemic autoimmune disease rather than just involving the joints
- Earlier diagnosis and institution of treatment significantly reduces disease-related disability and morbidity
- High index of suspicion with referral of suspected cases to specialty care early, improves treatment outcomes
- Despite many new additions to the growing list of DMARDs, methotrexate remains the most effective initial drug of choice if not otherwise contraindicated
- Elderly onset rheumatoid arthritis (EORA) can be a diagnostic and therapeutic challenge due to atypical presentation and comorbidities

#### References

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3. Littlejohn EA, Monrad SU. Early Diagnosis and Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis. *Prim Care*. 2018 Jun;45(2):237-255. doi: 10.1016/j.pop.2018.02.010. PMID: 29759122.



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## History of PeMSAA - UK

PeMSAA-UK is a young but dynamic and cohesive association thriving on unity and close friendship founded in early 2017. The idea to form this association was conceived following the visit to the 40<sup>th</sup> PeMSAA Congress in January 2017 by four UK alumni, Drs Krish Radhakrishnan, Dharshini Radhakrishnan, Abey Abeyasekara & Jeyakumar Singanayagam. It was felt that it's time to re-ignite the passion and share in the memories of our time at Peradeniya Medical School.

A mail was sent on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2017 to about 100 UK alumni as an introduction to the concept of rejuvenating the PeMSAA-UK and an opportunity to seek their thoughts and blessings.

The response received was exceptional and about 17 enthusiastic and passionate alumni representing different decades of the faculty years from all over the UK gathered on 17<sup>th</sup> March at Loughton, Essex to form the nucleus of the association. The ideas, concerns and expectations were discussed and debated, a plan emerged and the goals were set. On that day we also formed an interim committee and timeline to draft a constitution based on "fostering and promoting close relations between the School and its alumni and among the alumni members themselves" and to plan an AGM along with a social event in May 2017.

From the outset there was unanimous support for this association to be a non-political organisation, promoting unity and equity among all the alumni. The inaugural event of the PeMSAA-UK was held on 17<sup>th</sup> May under the auspicious presence and blessings of Professor and Mrs T Varagunam. The interim committee was ratified at the AGM that was followed by the first PeMSAA-UK Ball attended by alumni, their spouses and well-wishers. A total of 280 guests rolled in with spouses in tow for Canapés and Champaign welcome reception at Hilton Watford, Hertfordshire.



The support and encouragement received at this inaugural event motivated the Committee and the alumni to spearhead various activities and projects to assist alma mater and the alumni. Our objectives and goals were;

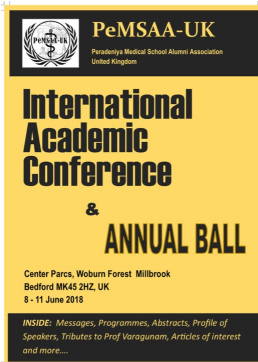
1. To encourage, foster and promote close relations between the Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya, here after named 'School' and its alumni residing in the UK and elsewhere.
2. To assist and support, financially and otherwise, the School, staff, undergraduates, and post graduates studying in the UK and alumni as appropriate.
3. To initiate, assist and support activities, which are of interest and benefit to the alumni.
4. To promote companionship programs and events involving alumni in the affairs of the School ensuring bilateral benefit.
5. To promote mentorships between alumni and students of the School along with student welfare support linked to the academic progress and behavior of the student.
6. To provide mutual exchange of information, professional expertise, and collaboration beneficial to alumni, the School and students.

Since the inception PeMSAA-UK has established very close working relationship with the parent PeMSAA and the sister associations in USA and Australasia.

PeMSAA-UK supported and established worthy projects assisting the students and the faculty by setting up;

- PeMSAA-UK Studentships
- PeMSAA-UK & Professor Panabokke Stethoscope awards
- Fully subscribing for International Journal of Medicine & Surgery
- 2<sup>nd</sup> MBBS book donations for needy students and reference books for the Faculty Library
- PeMSAA-UK Academic awards to encourage Research Projects at grass root level
- Mentoring and Career guidance to those visiting UK for post MD Fellowships.

PeMSAA-UK decided on an extravagant celebration for year 2018; a weekend residential programme hosting an exceptional International Academic Conference, Professor Varagunam Memorial Lecture followed by the Annual Ball.



The choice of venue was most fitting, for a group of medics who enjoyed their heady undergraduate days in the most salubrious campus in Asia, the Peradeniya Campus. The drive into the calm, leafy roads of Center Parcs, brought back the nostalgia about the days we spent walking through the most beautiful roads and alleyways of the Peradeniya Campus. The speakers, both alumni, current academic staff of Peradeniya Medical School and guest speakers were at the 'top of their game'

Professor Varagunam Memorial Lecture delivered by Professor Sreeharan was poignant and truly acknowledged the forward-thinking man's legacy. The audience was mesmerized by the predictions for the healthcare environment for 2025 and beyond.



The dramatic entertainment on Sunday had us all in stitches, it made us realise that the 'Peradeniya Brand' excels not only in high medical standards but also in the performing arts! The biennial International Academic Conference and delivery of the prestigious Professor Varagunam Memorial Lecture are supposed to be held as regular events, however due to the COVID-19 Pandemic we couldn't host an event since June 2018.

PeMSAA-UK Academic Awards 2019 & 2021 winners - Academic awards are offered for undergraduates and postgraduates to encourage Research Projects at grass root level.



Few of our committee members and alumni joined forces with parent PeMSAA and KSM to deliver regular workshops sharing their experience and expertise at the faculty, however this hasn't happened since 2019 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Despite all the interruptions and distractions due to prevailing COVID-19 situation, PeMSAA-UK continued to adapt to the challenges, readily embraced the online platforms to host regular highly sought-after academic webinars which were well attended by the global alumni and other interested participants.

We also used the online platform to present social activities and entertainment such as singsong, western and eastern classical dances & Pera-Style Laughter Medicine with fun packed comedy clips by Peradeniya Medical School Alumni. PeMSAA-UK and alumni also collaborated with the parent PeMSAA during their online social activity, which continued to strengthen our relationships.



Our glamorous and star events are annual Balls and social activities, which are also our fund-raising events. Our annual and life membership also assist to raise funds to support our various projects at the faculty, currently we have about 95 paid annual and life members and we endeavour to encourage and attract more paid members into our association.

Through monetary donations or volunteerism, the generosity and commitment of our alumni makes a real difference in assisting the faculty. Alumni working together can make transformations in the lives of Peradeniya Medical students today, who are destined to be the leaders of tomorrow. PeMSAA-UK considers good communication is paramount for networking to achieve our goals. This is supported by our well-resourced and dynamic website [www.pemsaa.lk](http://www.pemsaa.lk) and regular Newsletters.

The transparency and working within the statute are of utmost importance for PeMSAA-UK, hence we have an up-to-date Constitution, approved policies and Management Committee Handbook as our reference guides. These are also uploaded onto our website for public scrutiny. Furthermore, we have elected Trustees who function as guardians to maintain quality assurance of our committee and the association.



PeMSAA-UK is still a new association, however there is enthusiasm and commitment among the UK alumni to work tirelessly to achieve our goals and to identify new objectives for the future. The great Nelson Mandela famously said, "there is no greater gift than that of giving one's time and energy to helping others without expecting anything in return." PeMSAA-UK management committee and UK alumni will continue to dedicate our services and share our experiences for the development of alumni & alma mater without expecting anything in return.

**Dr Krish T Radhakrishnan**  
Past President (May 2017 - Sept 2021)

## Donation of Tabs

With the abrupt shift towards online education in Sri Lankan Universities, it has become essential for students to possess a laptop or a Tab to successfully follow the courses. Thus, the newest addition to the programmes that PEMSAA has adopted to support needy students is the donation of Tabs, which was initiated last year. In 2022 July, eight more students from different batches received Tabs, along with protective casings. The Scholarship Committee of the Faculty of Medicine coordinated the selection process. PeMSAA wishes to extend its gratitude towards all the well-wishers, including PeMSAA UK, individual alumni and private donors, whose generosity helped in achieving this feat.





## Soft Skills Development Lecture Series

Yet another programme directed towards fostering soft skills among doctors organized by PeMSAA was held on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022, under the title "Personal Financial Management and Online Freelancing Opportunities". A very informative and interactive session was conducted by Ms. Ganga Fernando (Senior Lecturer, Department of Finance, University of Colombo) and Mr. Dilshan Abeygunawardena (Serial Venture Capitalist, YouTuber and Digital Content Creator), with Dr. Sakunthala Jayasinghe, Social Secretary of PeMSAA moderating the event. There was a lot of enthusiasm among young and budding doctors who participated at the event. Dr. Saman Walisinghe, Vice President of PeMSAA, plays the leading role in organizing the "Soft Skills Development lecture Series".

## Housewarming of the newly built house of Ms. Nayana Jayawardana

Ms. Nayana Jayawardana, the labourer hired by PeMSAA to maintain the landscaped areas of the Faculty under the "Faculty Beautification Programme", faced an unfortunate incident last year when her house was destroyed by an earthslip. PeMSAA stepped up to support her family during this catastrophe, and raised funds to build a new accommodation with donations from its membership. The project which was carried out with much haste reached its completion within a year. On behalf of PeMSAA, Prof. Thushara Kudagammana participated at the modest housewarming event held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to all the well-wishers who contributed when one of our team members was in utmost need.



## Farewell to Dr. Ajantha Ranasinghe Welcome Dr. Chaturika Dandeniya

Dr. Ajantha Ranasinghe, the Assistant Treasurer of PeMSAA resigned from the Council as he would be temporarily out of the country. Apart from taking part in many activities of PeMSAA, he shouldered the major community project of PeMSAA 21/22, which is building a library for the Primary Section of Sarasavi Uyana Maha Vidyalaya. With his departure, Dr. Chaturika Dandeniya, Consultant Rheumatologist and Senior Lecturer, was nominated as a member of the Council of PeMSAA 21/22. Dr. Kasun Rambukwella was nominated as the new Assistant Treasurer.



## Upcoming Event: PeMSAA International Congress 2023

The preliminary planning of the grand finale of the two-year tenure of the PeMSAA Council 21/22 is now underway. It will be held on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of April, 2023, with the theme "Delivering Holistic Patient Care amidst Challenges". Prof. Heshan Jayaweera, Consultant Paediatrician, Prof. in Paediatrics and President Elect of PeMSAA has been elected as the Congress Chair and Dr. Chaturika Dandeniya, Consultant Rheumatologist and Senior Lecturer, has been elected as the Congress Secretary.



## News from overseas PeMSAA Chapters; PeMSAA - UK

Greetings from a very sombre United Kingdom grieving the death of Queen Elizabeth II. PeMSAA-UK have posted messages of condolences on our website, facebook and twitter pages. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of October PeMSAA-UK organised a very successful charity walk in a beauty spot called Box Hill in Surrey. It was an extremely hot day, but we managed to find a shaded walk that suited us all. Thanks to generous donations from alumni and well-wishers we made a healthy collection while having a very enjoyable time.

Due to the adverse economic situation in Sri Lanka, we are in the process of making a one-off payment to be utilised by the Dean as considered necessary to help the medical students in need. One of our alumnus Dr Metta Palipana has also agreed to donate personally towards this project. We thank him. Our AGM is scheduled for the 19<sup>th</sup> of November when Dr Ashan Gunaratna will take over the presidency. This will be followed by a dinner dance. The committee is hoping for a substantial profit to swell our coffers. This is my last contribution to the PeMSAA -SL newsletter. I hope all of you enjoyed reading it. I certainly enjoyed writing it and am glad that I, together with the committee helped the students even in very small ways.

As usual we remain committed to provide support to the students in The Faculty of Medicine, Peradeniya which I have no doubt will be carried on wholeheartedly by the incoming committee.

Dr. Padma Samarawickrama MBBS (Cey.), MRCP (UK), President PeMSAA - UK



## News from overseas PeMSAA Chapters; PeMSAA - Australasia



**PeMSAA - Australasia**  
Peradeniya Medical School Alumni Association

**7th PeMSAA Australasia Conference - 2022**  
Sydney  
Save the dates: 8-9th Oct 2022

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## 7<sup>th</sup> PeMSAA Australasia Conference 2022

Sydney 8-9<sup>th</sup> October 2022  
Save the dates

<https://www.pemsaaaustralasia.org/>



# Donations to PeMSAA Students Crisis Fund

The PeMSAA Student Crisis Fund was established to help Peradeniya medical students during an acute personal crisis such as serious personal health problems, serious health problems of parents or guardians including sudden death or permanent disability and loss of houses due to natural disaster etc. We welcome donations, either as one-off donations or as regular monthly sums to the fund. We sincerely hope our alumni will generously donate to this cause, remembering how difficult life could sometimes be during undergraduate years. The details of the fund are as follows.

Name of account: 'PeMSAA Student Crisis Fund', Account number: 87997354, Bank name: Bank of Ceylon Bank branch: Super Grade Branch Peradeniya, Swift code: BCEYLKX



**PeMSAA**  
Peradeniya Medical School  
Alumni Association



## Memorabilia



Now available for purchase at the PeMSAA office and via online orders

<https://www.pemsaa.org.lk/more/publications-merchandise/memorabilia.html>

### Becoming a PeMSAA member

The eligibility for membership is from two main categories; 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 are welcome to join.

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

### Contact PeMSAA

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