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## Editorial

### History of Sri Lanka Association of Dermatologists

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## Introduction

The Sri Lanka College of Dermatologists (SLCD) formed in 2005 originated from the Sri Lanka Association of Dermatologists (SLAD). SLAD was founded in 1985 when the dermatologist in Sri Lanka was "a man in a million". This documentation is based on records available to us and what I personally know regarding the SLAD.

To form an academic association was the brainchild of Dr. W. D. H. Perera who started his specialist career at General Hospital, Kandy. As far back as in 1982 the idea was conceived but there were only a few dermatologists in service at that time. They were based in Colombo, Kandy, Kurunegala, Rathnapura, Galle and Badulla, with a few in the private sector as well. Since communication facilities were primitive they worked in isolation. Thus the original objective of forming an association was to facilitate exchange of ideas. From 1982 to 1985, several small informal meetings were held at various national and international gatherings to formulate plans to start the academic body. The key people involved were Dr. W. D. H. Perera, Dr. D. N. Atukorala, Dr. L. Ranasinghe and late Dr. Gunter Schwenzer. The latter was a German dermatological surgeon from Hamburg who used to visit Sri Lanka frequently.

## The birth of the Association

On the 5th of October 1985, a meeting was held at the council room of the Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA), Wijerama Mawatha, Colombo 6, where a few dermatologists discussed the issues relating to the formation of an association. At this meeting the task of drafting a constitution was entrusted to Dr. W. D. H. Perera and Dr. D. N. Atukorala.

Subsequently, the inaugural general meeting of the new Association was held on the 19th of October, 1985 at the SLMA and the office bearers were elected. Dr. L. Ranasinghe, an eminent and the senior most dermatologist was elected founder President of the new Association. He

was one of the few Sri Lankans to have obtained the MRCP in Dermatology from the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, UK. Dr. D. N. Atukorala was elected general secretary and Dr. W. D. H. Perera was elected assistant secretary and treasurer. Dr. M. Nadarajah, consultant dermatologist at General Hospital, Colombo at the time, was elected to the office of the Vice President. Late Dr. G. M. Heennilame, a general practitioner with special training in dermatology, Dr. K. H. Weerasekara and Dr. T. T. Kasturiratne, both consultant dermatologists were elected to the committee. The founder members, 13 in number were as follows. Dr. L. Ranasinghe, Dr. D. N. Atukorala, Dr. W. D. H. Perera, Dr. K. H. Weerasekara, Dr. G. M. Heennilame, Dr. T. T. Kasturiratne, Dr. M. Nadarajah, Dr. W. Chularathne, Dr. P. V. B. Dharmagunawardene, Dr. G. A. Katugampola, Dr. M. J. P. de Silva, Dr. P. de S. Jayasinghe, and Dr. D. M. R. Gunawardene. Dr. G. Schwenzer, a member of the German Dermatological Society (GDS) who was a special invitee conveyed good wishes and offers of cooperation from Prof. Eno Christophers, President of the GDS at that time. The constitution was presented and formally accepted at this meeting. The new association was named the Sri Lanka Association of Dermatology.

The objectives of the Association were to advance knowledge, promote research and communication between the dermatologists both at national and international levels.

The president and the committee met for the first time on the 29th of October, 1985 and this was reported in the newspapers. They started work with enthusiasm to plan a joint meeting with the German Dermatological Society in 1986 to mark the 1st anniversary of the Sri Lanka Association of Dermatology. The joint meeting was held at Hotel Galadari, Colombo and was an enormous success. The German delegation was headed by Prof. Eno Christophers, the President of the German Dermatological Society and included Dr. Max Hundaiker, and several other eminent German dermatologists. Among the medical fraternity this was one of the few academic sessions to be held in such grand style at a leading hotel in Colombo.

Sri Lanka underwent a politically turbulent period from years 1987 to 1990. The Association too was dormant during these years except for an occasional meeting. The highlights during these years were that the constitution was amended in 1987 and a lecture was delivered by Dr. W. D. H. Perera to the members after participating in the World Congress of Dermatologists in Munich in 1988, based on its content.

By 1991, the situation in the country improved and the Association commenced its activities again. Dr. (Mrs.) K. H. Weerasekara was elected President with Dr. W. D. H. Perera as secretary, and Dr. G. Sirimanne as treasurer. In 1992, it was decided to initiate regional clinical meetings to facilitate exchange of information. These meetings were held in different hospitals, with Dr. Manel Dissanayake hosting the first meeting at General Hospital, Kurunegala. During such regional meetings, the consultant dermatologist with his/her staff presented many interesting cases for discussion, encouraging fellowship among members and always concluded with a social function, strengthening the bonds between members. During this period a logo was designed and official letterheads were printed. The name of the Association was also changed from the Sri Lanka Association of Dermatology to Sri Lanka Association of Dermatologists.

From 1991 onwards academic sessions were held annually. An academic day session was usually followed by a fellowship dinner to which the spouses too were invited. There was goodwill and fellowship among the members and traditions and values were held in high esteem. Furthermore the exemplary conduct of the senior members was emulated by the junior members.

### A brief note about past Presidents

#### Dr. Lakshman Ranasinghe – the founder President

He is an eminent dermatologist with special interest in paediatric dermatology. A well recognized figure in the medical field, he held office as President of the Sri Lanka Medical Association (1984), College of Physicians (1986) and College of Paediatricians (1983-84). He had many international connections in the field of dermatology and was instrumental in organizing the first anniversary academic sessions in grand style.

#### Dr. D. N. Atukorala – the founder Secretary

A well known and much loved dermatologist, who is a household name in Sri Lanka. He was responsible for forging many links between the Association and the local medical elite. From the inception of the Association his contribution has been enormous. As a Consultant Dermatologist of the Ministry of Health he established dermatology units in several institutions. An academic of many talents he was responsible for training many dermatologists who are in senior positions today. He was also the pioneer chairperson of the Board of Study in Dermatology of the Post Graduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM).

**Dr. W. D. H. Perera** – the founder Treasurer and Assistant Secretary

A charming and erudite gentleman who knew all the rules and regulations, upheld correct values and maintained strict discipline and followed traditions. He too worked with much dedication to nurture the Association which was his brainchild. His contribution was outstanding, and he was successful in obtaining international recognition to the Association. For many years he represented the Association at the International League of Dermatological Societies (ILDS). The joint meeting with the Dowling Club of UK held during his presidency, was the first such event attended by a large number of dermatologists from overseas. He was a pioneer in establishing the South Asian Regional Association of Dermatology (SARAD). During the South Asian Regional Conference held in Colombo in 2003, he was appointed to the prestigious office of the President of South Asian Regional Association of Dermatology (SARAD), which he held for two years. He was also instrumental in introducing training programmes for doctors in general practice through the Association.

**Dr. K. H. Weerasekara**

The first lady dermatologist to be appointed by the Ministry of Health in Sri Lanka, she has a claim to beauty as well as a good sense of humor. In her own inimitable fashion she too made a significant contribution to the progress of the Association. She continues her support with much enthusiasm to this day.

**Dr. T. T. Kasthuriratne**

An efficient gentleman who brought much professionalism to the Association and was responsible for upgrading the ceremonial etiquette at academic sessions. It was he who delivered the presidential address for the first time at an inauguration of an annual academic session. He was also instrumental in introducing the first oration at the annual sessions. Felicitations of key office bearers of the Association with medals and plaques was commenced during his tenure. The idea of converting the Association to a college was also mooted by him.

**Dr. Ganga Sirimanna**

A quiet and unassuming lady of much distinction, she was the first PGIM trainee in dermatology. Later she worked hard as the treasurer, the secretary and the president of the association. With her hard work, commitment, dedication and an eye for accuracy she too made an enormous contribution to the progress of the Association. It was she who gave leadership to

successfully organize the South Asian Regional Conference of Dermatology (SARCD) in Sri Lanka in 2003.

**Dr. D. M. R. Gunawardena**

Always calm and quiet with his wide experience of working within various parts of the country, he too was an asset to the Association. Training in research including use of computer packages in statistics was introduced during his period in office.

**Dr. Prasad Kumarasinghe**

A charming and energetic gentleman of many talents. During his year as the President (2004/2005); he signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the Dermatological Society of Singapore (DSS). This led to the first joint meeting of the SLAD-DSS as well as an exchange programme of trainees to attend academic sessions of the two countries. He took a keen interest in training, and organized workshops and a joint meeting with the GDS during this period.

With the help of Dr. W. D. H. Perera and Dr. D. N. Athukorala he did most of the ground work for converting the Association into a college. He was the founder chairman of the Wound Care Foundation, Sri Lanka, the founder president of the Asian Society for Pigment Cell Research (ASPCR) and later the general secretary of the International Federation of Pigment Cell Societies.

**Dr. Manel Dissanayake**

Another elegant lady of distinction. She was elected President of the Association and continued as the first President of the College. The historical trilateral agreement between the GDS, SLAD and University of Sri Jayewardenepura was signed during her tenure. She worked hard with her secretary Dr. Chalukya Gunasekera to bring about the change of the association to a college. She was instrumental in organizing the ceremonial mace of the Association.

**Office, documentation and maintaining of records**

In the early days, meetings were held at the SLMA council room or at the residence of each president. Later these meetings were held in ward 13, General Hospital, Colombo. It was in 1995 that an attic room in SLMA was rented as an office. However it was only used as a reading room. The present office space was rented in 2002 when the SLMA completed its refurbishment programme. This office was furnished by Mega Pharma (Pvt) Ltd together with Microlabs

Ltd and was ceremonially opened by Prof. Wolfram Sterry the President of the GDS who attended the joint meeting in 2002.

It is worthy of note to state that all documents related to the work of the Association were handwritten by the honorary secretaries for a number of years. Only a few documents were typed. This was not an easy task but the secretaries and the assistant secretaries worked hard to keep the documents in order. It was Dr. Ganga Sirimanna who started to keep the details of the membership in a CR book. This was later computerized by Dr. Antoinette Perera in year 2000. The first computer was donated by Indoscan (Pvt) Ltd. and the present computer was donated by International League of Dermatological Societies (ILDS) in 2003.

It was only in the year 2002 that a permanent office assistant Mr. Zalmi Kassier was employed and a proper filing system was established.

### **Newsletters and Sri Lanka Journal of Dermatology**

Dr. Lakshman Ranasinghe and Dr. Gamini Katugampola were the first joint editors appointed to the council in 1991. They were responsible for drawing up a format for the journal and instructions to authors.

The first news letter was published in January 1996 by Dr. Ganga Sirimanne, secretary of the Association at that time. Since then it has become a regular feature and carries academic and social information.

The first journal was published only in 1995 when Dr. D. N. Athukorala took up duties as the editor. It was officially launched during the visit of the Dowling club to Sri Lanka in 1996. The journal flourished under the efficient editorship of Dr. D. N. Athukorala giving the young dermatologists a forum to publish their research. In year 2002 Dr. Prasad Kumarasinghe was appointed joint editor and an editorial board too was appointed. This journal is now a peer reviewed journal. Dr. Athukorala was the chief editor for many years and these responsibilities have been entrusted to Dr. Ganga Sirimanne from 2006. He remains the chief advisor to the journal. Eleven volumes have been published up to date.

### **Training in Dermatology**

From 1979 - 1995 postgraduate training of specialists in dermatology was conducted by the Board of Study (BOS) in Medicine. Dr. D. N. Athukorala represented dermatology and also held the position of the secretary

of the BOS in medicine for 12 years. Those trainees who opted for Dermatology following the successful completion of MD Medicine were trained in a dermatology unit. Dr. Ganga Sirimanna was the first PG trainee who commenced training under Dr. M. Nadarajah, Consultant Dermatologist at the General Hospital, Colombo.

Later, due to the untiring efforts of Dr. W. D. H. Perera and Dr. D. N. Atukorala, a separate Board of Study (BOS) for dermatology was granted by the PGIM. This board was established in 1995 with Dr. D. N. Atukorala as the chairperson and Dr. Ganga Sirimanne as secretary. The curriculum was designed for post MD training in dermatology. Later after much debate it was decided to launch a new training programme to award an MD in dermatology.

The planning of curriculum, methods of teaching etc. were formulated by the members of the BOS. It is worthy of note that the major work load was handled by Dr. D. N. Atukorala, Dr. W. D. H. Perera and Dr. Ganga Sirimanne. This programme was commenced in year 2000 and so far, 54 trainees have completed the programme and some are serving different parts of the country, as Consultant Dermatologists.

There was much support from GDS for the new programme. A consultant dermatologist from Germany visits every year to reside in Sri Lanka for a month conducting a series of teaching sessions, to both trainees and members of the SLCD.

Subsequently in year 2005 the GDS offered to sponsor a Chair in Dermatology in any faculty of Medicine in Sri Lanka. This was accepted by the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and a trilateral agreement was signed at a ceremony held at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in 2006. This position was awarded to Dr. Jayamini Seneviratne, the first Professor of Dermatology in Sri Lanka.

### **What the Association gained through national and international relationships**

A list of international conferences organized in Sri Lanka by the Association, are given below.

First Annual Academic Sessions and Joint Meeting with GDS 1986.

Annual Sessions and Joint Meeting with Dowling Club (UK) in 1996.

Annual Sessions and Joint Meeting with GDS in 1998, 2002, 2005.

South Asian Regional Conference of Dermatology 2003. Annual Sessions and Joint Meeting with Dermatological Society of Singapore in 2006.

The SLAD was an internationally recognized body. It is also a member of the ILDS and of the South Asian Regional Association of Dermatologists (SARAD). Dr. W. D. H. Perera was elected President of this prestigious association and held this post for 2 years. The senior members of the association were elected to the council of SARAD.

Postgraduate training in dermatology includes a mandatory overseas component in a centre of excellence for training. The links established through the SLAD have proved extremely useful in securing such posts. The young dermatologists receive scholarships to attend the annual academic sessions of American Academy of Dermatology and that of Singapore every year. ILDS offers financial grants to purchase teaching equipment.

GDS donated a variety of valuable books on dermatology to the members of the Association. The senior members were invited to participate at the annual academic sessions of the GDS in 2007. The GDS offered a financial grant to establish an endowment Chair in Dermatology in any University in Sri Lanka and this was established at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, thus strengthening the undergraduate as well as post graduate education in dermatology.

The unity and mutual support established by the pioneers are yet being maintained. The future dermatologists have a duty to maintain and strengthen these bonds keeping in mind the hard work and services rendered by their predecessors.

### Conversion to a college

The SLAD was officially converted to a College in May 2005 and the event was celebrated at the Annual Academic Sessions of March 2006. It was Dr. Kasturiratne who first presented this idea during his period as President and Dr. Prasad Kumarasinghe who revived it and initiated the change during his tenure as President in 2004. The actual legal change was made in 2005. Blue and gold were chosen as college colours as suggested by Dr. W. D. H. Perera. The logo remained the same with only a change in lettering. A mace and ceremonial cloaks were also made.

This narrative summarizes and highlights the commitment, hard work and dedication that formed the scaffolding on which the Sri Lanka Association of Dermatologists was built.

I would like to conclude with the following poem  
by Wordsworth

Heights by great men reached and kept  
Were not attained by sudden flight  
They while their companions slept  
Were toiling upwards in the night.

M S A Perera

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