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1st International Conference on Tropical Dermatology (ICTD) - The dawn of a new era

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Tropical Dermatoses encompass a wide array of dermatological problems that are unique to tropical and subtropical regions. However, due to several reasons the term Tropical Dermatoses cannot be sharply defined. For example centuries ago leprosy was much prevalent in temperate countries though now it is considered as one of the major tropical dermatoses.

Tropical countries have unique environmental, biological, economical, social and cultural aspects different from those of non tropical countries. Despite their varied economic, political, and social histories, except for a few, most of the tropical countries remain as developing countries with lower economic growth rates due to many complex reasons. As a result, overcrowding and poor living conditions are major concerns regarding the tropical diseases. As 40% of world populations live in the tropics, the burden on health systems due to these diseases is enormous.

Though infections account for a major portion of 17 neglected tropical diseases there are many other conditions which are tropical dermatoses in the true sense. These include many pigmentary disorders, various dermatoses induced by cultural practices and the disorders related to environmental factors such as exposure to sun, sea, plants and insects. Most of these conditions are not subjected to sufficient investigations and research. Some of these conditions are in fact, classified as neglected tropical dermatoses by the WHO. Another important feature is that there is a great variation in the pattern of diseases and their prevalence, within the tropics among different countries. Furthermore, though tropical dermatoses are commonly seen in tropics, they are not limited to this region. Specially, with increasing international travelling and migration, Dermatologists practicing outside the tropics also encounter tropical dermatoses in their practice.

With the aim of creating a forum for exchange of ideas and spread of knowledge on tropical dermatology among the dermatological fraternity and to create avenues towards improvement in patient care, Sri Lanka College of Dermatologists (SLCD) took the initiative in organizing an international conference on tropical dermatology. This idea blossomed in the mind of Dr. Prasad Kumarasinghe, a Sri Lankan Dermatologist

domiciled in Australia now. It surfaced during the academic meetings way back in 2009. However it took several years for this to materialize.

The planning of the International Conference on Tropical Dermatology took wings in April 2014. A steering committee was appointed. Organizers wanted the best experts in the world to be resource persons for this conference. Prof. Prasad Kumarasinghe and Prof. Jayamini Seneviratne were instrumental in inviting these experts, through the International Society of Dermatology and also through their personal contacts.

The name "International Conference on Tropical Dermatology 2016, Colombo Sri Lanka" was adapted under the theme "Topics from Tropics". A website was created as www.ictd2016.org. A venue with tropical sea breeze, Hotel Kingsbury Colombo was selected. A programme consisted of plenary lectures, symposia on major topics, recent advances, guest lectures, free papers, and posters covering most of the areas of tropical dermatology. On the first day, pre-congress session in the morning was followed by the grand inauguration ceremony in the evening. The president of the International Society of Dermatology, Dr. Evangaline Handog also graced the occasion as the chief guest. She delivered a very inspiring speech. The cultural show at the inauguration ceremony by the talented Sri Lankan artists was much appreciated by the participants. This was followed by two days of scientific conference. On the fourth day participants had a unique experience of examining a wide array of patients with tropical dermatoses, at the clinical meeting organized in NHSL (National Hospital of Sri Lanka, Colombo).

We tried our best to send the message across, about ICTD, to all the countries in the world. As this is the first time we organized a conference of this nature, it was a difficult task. However, it was an immense pleasure to see delegates from over 24 countries, attending the conference. They enjoyed the scenic beauty of our island as well, during the stay.

The total number of delegates was 230 and there were forty six renowned clinicians and scientists in the relevant fields from twelve countries sharing their knowledge and expertise as resource persons. They were from Australia, Brazil, Cambodia, Germany, India, Iran, The Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, United Kingdom and Sri Lanka. The guest lectures by world leaders on tropical dermatology were of high scientific and practical value. All the major tropical dermatology topics including emerging

and reemerging infections, pigmentary disorders as well as sociocultural dermatoses were discussed. Leishmaniasis and leprosy were covered in greater detail in several symposia. The clinical meeting with patients having numerous typical and atypical tropical dermatoses was also outstanding.

The organizing committee worked tirelessly to make the International Conference on Tropical Dermatology 2016 Colombo, Sri Lanka a memorable experience. The excellent Sri Lankan and fusion food served at the hotel was gastronomically delightful. Many delegates managed to find some time to explore Colombo as well as other parts of our beautiful country. We have no doubt that those who could not explore the country, will return to this beautiful island in not too distant future.

Many old friendships between international delegates were renewed and many new friendships were established. Already several participants have started planning work on new collaborative scientific research. The organizing committee of ICTD 2016 humbly acknowledges congratulatory messages and appreciative comments received regarding the conference, not only from the resource persons and delegates but also from dermatological societies world over.

The Sri Lanka College of Dermatologists is very grateful to all the guest speakers who came from far away countries to address this conference. From the beginning we received immense support from the International Society of Dermatology (ISD). The SLCD is grateful to the ISD President Dr Handog and the Board of Directors of the ISD for supporting this meeting. All the delegates from diverse countries from all over the world are cordially acknowledged. The SLCD expresses its gratitude to the WHO, Sri Lanka Conventions Bureau and the sponsors from the pharmaceutical trade who supported this important event.

ICTD 2016 will be a landmark event in Sri Lankan Dermatology. Hopefully it will set the precedence for many more advanced International Conferences on Tropical Dermatology to follow. Considering the great success we had with the ICTD 2016, already SLCD is planning to have the next Tropical Dermatology Conference in 2020.

I hope these endeavors will harness the collective spirit and enthusiasm on Tropical Dermatology, opening pathways for better care of patients with such diseases.

Janaka Akarawita, *President SLCD and Chairperson Organizing Committee ICTD 2016.*