

The visit of the Dowling Club to Sri Lanka

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The visit of the Dowling Club to Sri Lanka in January 1996 was a unique and a memorable event. Since the Journal of the Sri Lanka Association of Dermatologists was launched during this visit, the editor thought it proper to record this event in the present issue.

The birth of the Dowling Club was in October 1946 as a journal club at the St Thomas's Hospital in London. The founder Dr Geoffrey Dowling, affectionately known at the time as the Headmaster was a leading Dermatologist who was largely responsible for the renaissance of Dermatology in the post war period in England¹. The journal club was formally named the Dowling Club to honour its founder in his partial retirement in 1956. The membership and the activities of the club expanded and now includes a Dowling oration and dinner, overseas visit and the usual monthly meetings. In accordance with the wishes of its founder priority is rightly given to the younger colleagues. The first overseas visit was in 1948 to the famous Hospital Saint Louis in Paris. The club has now visited many countries around the globe.

The delegation of the Dowling Club visiting Sri Lanka in 1996 consisted of thirty members, including the President of the club Dr Susan Burge and the Secretary Dr Pauline Marren. The annual academic meeting of the Sri Lanka Association of Dermatologists and the joint meeting with the Dowling Club got underway on Saturday 20th January at 6.30pm at the ballroom of the Hotel Ceylon Intercontinental Colombo. After the welcome speech by the President, which included glimpses in to Dermatology in Sri Lanka in the past and the present, Dr Susan Burge spoke on Dermatology Art and Science which was well received by the mixed audience of doctors, spouses and well-wishers. The guest of honour at the occasion was Mr Peter Gergory-Hood The deputy High Commissioner for Britain in Sri Lanka. The

cultural show which followed depicting Sri Lankan dance routines was an introduction of our foreign guests to the culture of the country.

A full day's academic sessions were held on Sunday the 21st at the Lionel Memorial Auditorium of the Wijerama House which is the home of the Sri Lanka Medical Association founded in 1887 and the Sri Lanka Medical Library founded in 1844². There were in all eight review lectures of 20 minutes duration from both local and foreign experts. Some of the topics covered were Lymphoedema, Hailey Hailey Disease, Bullous Diseases, Plant Dermatitis, Leprosy and HIV infection. A very successful and novel social marketing approach to the control of Leprosy in Sri Lanka was one of the highlights. The free papers of 10 minutes duration covered a wide range of topics from case reports, classifications to changing patterns and present trends in dermatological diseases. The extremely high academic standard and the organisation of the session with absolute precision remains in our memory. The Annual Dinner in the evening at the Taj Samudra hotel was an occasion to relax and exchange gifts of goodwill.

The clinical session at the National Hospital in Colombo the following day saw an excellent cross section of cases and the case of congenital syphilis in a 14 year old I am certain, will be remembered by all. The scene moved in the afternoon from the capital of Colombo to Matara, the southernmost tip of the island with its golden beaches and a culture which is essentially rural. The selection of cases seen was excellent, some rare others extremely rare. The cases of lipoid protenosis and chromomycosis stands out among so many interesting problems. Then followed three days of travelling, enjoying the scenery, wildlife, birds and the tea country for the members of the Dowling Club. The last of the clinical sessions was held in the Teaching Hospital Kandy.

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Kandy known as the hill capital of the island was the last abode of the King of Lanka. There was a varied selection of cases, some rare presentations of common diseases and cases of tropical dermatology. The presentation of the case of pigmentation for diagnosis which was found to be a case of Dowling-Degos disease was a fitting and a dramatic finale to the academic activities and a tribute to the founder of the Dowling Club.

The final farewells were said on the evening of the 28th January at a dinner hosted by the much exhausted members of the Dowling Club. The Sri

Lanka Journal of Dermatology was launched at this simple ceremony and the first ever copies of the journal were distributed to all present.

The visit of the Dowling Club will be remain in my memory for a long time to come.

References

1. Hugh Wallace. Obituaries, Dr G B Dowling. *British Journal of Dermatology*. 1976; **95**: 677-680.
2. C G Urugoda. History of Medicine in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka Medical Association. 1987.