

Birth of the first paediatric dermatology unit at Lady Ridgeway Hospital, Colombo

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Sri Lanka Journal of Dermatology, 2003, 7, 38

In the late fifties and the sixties Sri Lanka had a population of around 10 million, and 2 dermatologists to serve that population. Dr. Chelvarajah was the first dermatologist to be appointed in the Health Service of Sri Lanka. His appointment was to the then General Hospital of Colombo. He was succeeded by Dr V. T. Rathnayake in 1966. He was also the visiting dermatologist in Lady Ridgeway Hospital (LRH) and a weekly clinic was conducted on Wednesday mornings at room 2 in the OPD.

When Dr Lakshman Ranasinghe, a paediatrician with a special interest in dermatology, was appointed to LRH as the VP-OPD, many patients were referred to him during the other days of the week. Those who needed indoor dermatological treatment were admitted to ward 13 General Hospital, Colombo. The consultant at GHC was also summoned by paediatricians as and when necessary to see patients in the wards.

Subsequent consultants at General Hospital, Colombo continued to conduct the Wednesday morning clinic upto the eighties.

In the nineties a functional skin clinic was established on a daily basis and Dr N. Seneviratne was appointed as the first MO Dermatology at LRH. She had the privilege of referring the difficult cases to the visiting Dermatologist on Wednesday.

The idea of establishing a proper Dermatology Unit at LRH was promoted by the Sri Lanka Association of Dermatologists under the guidance of Dr D. N. Atukorala, Senior Consultant Dermatologist. The controversy whether a paediatrician or a

dermatologist should be appointed in charge, continued. In the late nineties, when the Department of Health Services decided to advertise it to Dermatologists, Dr J. K. K. Seneviratne, Consultant Dermatologist was appointed as the first full time Dermatologist at LRH in 2001.

As the previous room was inadequate to serve a large number of children affected with skin diseases, a new clinic was established in the former X-ray department. This consists of a clinic, an adjacent Dermatology pharmacy, a treatment room, a photography room and a patients' waiting area. The old number system was also done away with, and the average time a patient spends from arrival, consultation and to collecting of medicines, has been reduced drastically with the new system.

The Director LRH Dr Wimal Jayantha, on a request by Dr J. Seneviratne, Consultant Dermatologist, was able to provide a cubicle with six beds to accommodate in ward patients. This was opened in January 2002. Currently there are several house officers, one senior house officer, one dermatology registrar and a senior registrar in dermatology at this unit.

Now clinics are held from Monday to Saturday from 8.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon. On average over 150 children seek treatment every day at this paediatric dermatology unit. Clinical teaching sessions held at the unit are highly popular among aspiring dermatologists.

Establishment of the paediatric dermatology unit at LRH is a major milestone in evolution of the specialty of Dermatology in Sri Lanka.

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