

Editorial

Development of paediatrics in Sri Lanka

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It is just over a hundred years ago that a Sri Lankan child was recognized as an individual requiring special attention and care and not treated as a miniature adult.

The first attempt to treat children separately from adults was in 1892 when Dr Van Ingen arrived in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) and started a children's outpatient department (OPD)¹. Four years later came the opening of the hospital for women and children, the Lady Havelock Hospital. The first and only hospital for children, the Lady Ridgeway Hospital (LRH) was opened in 1910. Both these hospitals were built with public donations. The children's hospital was under the care of Obstetricians and Surgeons initially until 1937 when the professor of medicine and the professor of surgery were appointed visiting physician and visiting surgeon to the Ridgeway. In 1937 Dr L O Abeyratne who had specialized in paediatrics in Edinburgh was appointed as physician and medical officer in charge of the Lady Ridgeway Hospital. Thus 1937 marked a new era for children when they were considered worthy of a full time physician visiting them daily. That year also saw the beginning of paediatric training of medical students and medical officers. Since then child care has improved by leaps and bounds. With the appointment of more medical officers there was a new awakening of the needs of children and plans were made for the betterment of children, the sick and healthy.

Through the efforts of Dr L O Abeyratne, the late S W R D Bandaranayake, then Minister of Health drew up plans for the expansion of the LRH and Dr Abeyratne carried the blue prints in his pockets. Our hope was that the day will dawn when this dream would come true. Soon there were other appointments to the staff - Dr Stanley de Silva who introduced the house staff to see the newborn at the de Soysa Maternity Hospital and Castle Street Maternity Hospital. Another advancement came with the appointment of C C de Silva as professor of paediatrics in 1949.

Dr Abeyratne began to realize his dream. The new block (wards 1, 2, 3, 4,) was opened in 1950 by S W R D Bandaranayake the Minister of Health, the OPD block was also opened by S W R D Bandaranayake in 1951. Besides the OPD this block housed the administration block, x-ray

department, lecture theatre, library, and house officers quarters.

With the advent of new facilities and new staff, LRH soon became the centre for paediatric learning, teaching, research, and continuing medical education. It opened its doors and welcomed doctors from other hospitals, municipality, and the private sector. Weekly meetings were held and problems pertaining to the child were discussed. The following programmes were introduced.

- Immunisation against tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus,
- Well Baby Clinics,
- Home Visiting
- Family Planning
- Convalescent Home at Thalagolla

In 1952 the Ceylon Paediatric Association was inaugurated with Dr L O Abeyratne as the first President and Professor C C de Silva as the first Secretary. This was affiliated to the International Paediatric Association. With the passage of time and change of name of Ceylon it became the Sri Lanka Paediatric Association (SLPA) and finally Sri Lanka College of Paediatricians. Sri Lanka Paediatric Association organized annual paediatric conferences. The first one with a guest lecturer was in 1961 with Dr Martin Bodian of Great Ormond Street, London, the second in 1962 with Dr Sydney Gellis of Boston. This became a continuous uninterrupted feature up to date. This involved the paediatricians of the whole country terminating as a social event, the banquet.

The association has had a new president each year and each one has added a new feature for the development of paediatrics in the country - the last president introduced a scheme whereby the hospital paediatricians would visit the community.

The paediatric activities have been documented over the years. They were first published in the *Journal of the Children's Hospital*². The official publication of the Sri Lanka Paediatric Association, the *Ceylon Journal of Child Health*, was published in 1963, with Dr W G Gomes and Dr T D D Bulugahapitiya as the first joint editors³. It has been

published uninterrupted annually with just a change of name to Sri Lanka Journal of Child Health. In the year 2000 with the formation of the College in 1996 it became the official publication of the Sri Lanka College of Paediatricians. The annual publication became a quarterly journal from the beginning of year 2000 and from September 2001 i.e. the last issue, our journal has taken one further giant step and joined the on line cohort in the internet

There has been a phenomenal improvement in child care in the country. The Lady Ridgeway Hospital has opened a new block for surgical specialized units in 2000. Paediatric units have been established in all provinces and districts. A country which appointed its first paediatrician in 1937 at LRH has, in the year 2000, 49 paediatricians in 8 provinces.

The first department of paediatrics at LRH was established in 1949 and today there are 6 departments of paediatrics. A postgraduate institute of medicine (University of Colombo) with a separate Board of Study in Paediatrics was established in 1980.

Total number of board certified consultants stands at 83⁴.

Number of trainees undergoing overseas training 37.

Paediatricians in Sri Lanka

Ministry of Health	70
Universities	21
Private sector	17
Paediatric Surgeons	07

there are no cases of diphtheria. Above all, the infant mortality rate of around 17/1000 live births proves our success story.

Infant Mortality Rate per 1000 live births⁵

Year	IMR
1945	140.0
1955	72.4
1980	34.4
1995	16.5
1996	15.4

Source: Annual Health Bulletin 1999, Dept of Health Services

References

1. de Silva Stella. The Development of Child Health Services in Ceylon. *Ceylon Journal of Child Health*. 5: 1-8.
2. The *Journal of Children's Hospital*, 1951-57; 1-6.
3. Gomes WG, Bulugahapitiya TDD. *Ceylon Journal of Child Health* 1961.
4. Postgraduate Institute of Medicine exams department, 22 Nov 2001.
5. Annual Health Bulletin, 1999, Dept. of Health Services.

Stella G de Silva

The actual health indices have improved in the country. We have eliminated poliomyelitis whereas we had an epidemic in 1962. LRH had a tracheostomy ward for laryngeal diphtheria, now