

Editorial

Quirks of medical registration: A dilemma for those involved in child health

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The Ceylon Medical Council was enacted several decades ago by an Act of Parliament and was entrusted with the necessary statutory powers of registration and disciplinary control of doctors practising in the country. The name of the organization was changed to that of the Sri Lanka Medical Council (SLMC) in recent years.

This institution provides provisional/temporary registration covering the internship/pre-registration period followed by full registration to all doctors who wish to practise western medicine in the country. A basic degree of MBBS from any of the Faculties of Medicine from the recognised universities in Sri Lanka or an equivalent degree from any other recognised institution worldwide is the minimum requirement for full registration. Such registration empowers a practitioner to practise western medicine in Sri Lanka.

Although it is a mandatory requirement to have full registration to enable one to practise western medicine in Sri Lanka, it is common knowledge that literally thousands of unqualified people, colloquially known as “quacks”, practise western medicine in this country. They go about their unlawful business relentlessly and with apparent impunity. The watchdogs of the medical fraternity seem to be completely powerless to bring the culprits to book. It is of particular concern to us, who are involved in child health care, as the future citizens of this country may be subjected to, to say the least, sub-optimal and possibly dangerous forms of management in the hands of these unscrupulous individuals. This sorry state of affairs has gone on for a number of decades without even a glimmer of hope indicating a redress of the balance.

Over the last couple of years, the SLMC has embarked upon a fresh re-registration programme of those already registered. Unfortunately a large and significant number of practising qualified and registered doctors of this island have failed to embark on this process of re-registration. Although dire penalties, like cancellation of registration, has been invoked by the SLMC as punishments for failure to comply with their request for re-registration, it is a

matter for regret that such penalties have, so far, to the best of our knowledge, not been invoked on anyone. One may justifiably wonder how the SLMC would be hoping to deal with the “quacks” if the institution is not in a position to even deal with those found wanting in its own registered ranks.

In addition to the registration of basic degrees, the SLMC also provides the facility of registering additional recognised qualifications like the MD, MRCP, MRCPCH, FRCP, FRCPC, FRCS etc. This is of course at the expense of a statutory fee for each such qualification. However, quite regrettably, despite many and repeated appeals, the SLMC has not even considered the commencement of a “Specialist Register” for the entire country. This should not be such a daunting task as the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine of Sri Lanka provides Board Certification as Specialists and also empowers other suitably qualified individuals for privileges of Board Certification. Only on the institution of such a specialist register would the registration of additional qualifications become truly meaningful. It will also prevent the use of nebulous specialist status by people who are neither qualified nor properly trained to use such a status after their names. This is of particular concern to the Specialist Paediatricians of this country as children are regularly treated by such unscrupulous practitioners with grandiose specialist status annexed to their names, a position completely unwarranted by their qualifications and training.

Registration in the specialist register is a mandatory statutory requirement for practising medicine in a Consultant capacity in Singapore¹ and the UK². Although such a register is not operative in India³, Pakistan⁴ and Malaysia⁵, it is a real necessity in our country. It is the considered opinion of the Sri Lanka College of Paediatricians that such a specialist register would rectify at least some of the anomalies in the child health care practices of this island.

In the light of the absence of a specialist register one would justifiably be concerned with the recent directive sent by the SLMC, advising doctors not to use recognised additional qualifications after their

names UNLESS they are registered with the SLMC. One might understandably question the moral right of the SLMC to invoke such sanctions on qualifications properly obtained by individuals from different degree awarding institutions. For instance, should one obtain registration of an MD or MS legally obtained from the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine before one could use it after one's name? The indication of "Specialist" or "Consultant" status is one thing but the use of legal qualifications after the name is quite another. Till such time as a specialist register, which clearly distinguishes those with proper qualifications and training to function as Consultants, becomes operative, there is no ethical or moral justification for the insistence of the SLMC for registration of additional qualifications.

Many a sceptic would understandably say "One must put one's house in order before even attempting to put those of others in order".

References

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