

Obituary

Dr. Kamalika Abeyratne - Paediatrician MBBS (Ceylon), FRCP (Edin), DCH (Eng)

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Dr. Kamalika Abeyratne (nee Wickramasuriya) passed away a few months ago after battling a long drawn out illness with tremendous courage. Her life could perhaps be divided into different chapters.

Kamalika was one of four children born to a well-respected southern family. Her father, Professor George Wickramasuriya was the first Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the Ceylon Medical College; he was internationally known and recognized for his work in maternal malaria. Her mother belonged to the equally well-known Dias family of Panadura. Kamalika had her early education at CMS Ladies College, Colombo 7, and graduated from the Faculty of Medicine, Colombo with 2nd class honours in 1959. It was during her student days that she met her life-long companion, Michael, which resulted in a partnership which lasted nearly fifty years until her untimely death.

After graduation she accompanied Michael to U.K. for postgraduate studies and returned home after a few years with the MRCP (Edin) and DCH (England). In the mid 60's she worked as a resident paediatrician at the Lady Ridgeway Hospital (LRH). Michael himself trained as a Paediatric Surgeon and formed a wonderful professional cum family companionship which benefited thousands of children and their families both in Sri Lanka and Saudi Arabia. In Sri Lanka, Kamalika and Michael worked as specialists at the base hospital Gampaha, general hospital Anuradhapura and returned to LRH in the early 1970's. At Anuradhapura, she found the time to engage herself in research dealing with malaria and some aspects of glucose-6-phosphate

dehydrogenase deficiency. Few years ago, despite her failing health, she delivered the Professor K. Rajasuriya memorial oration to a packed audience at SLMA House, dealing with research carried out many decades ago.

In the 1970's life at Lady Ridgeway Hospital had its trials and tribulations due to internal politics. Kamalika and Michael, undeterred, provided a service par-excellence for the benefit of poor children who flocked to LRH from all parts of Sri Lanka. (I should know, because I was a colleague of theirs at that time!). She also participated very actively in the training of medical students and postgraduates. She functioned as an examiner at the final MBBS examination conducted by the Colombo Medical Faculty, MD (Paediatrics) and DCH examinations conducted by the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM) of the University of Colombo. She was also a member of the Board of Study in Paediatrics of the PGIM.

In the early 1980's, she and her husband with a group of doctors regularly held clinics in remote areas where new settlements had sprung up as the Mahaweli scheme flourished. When the Eelam war broke out she continued to visit border villages to look into the health needs of children. Few years later she joined her husband in Saudi Arabia and worked there for 4-5 years.

After returning to Sri Lanka, it is quite ironical that she met with that fateful accident whilst on her way to the deep south to conduct a health camp for the benefit of poor children. It is that accident which necessitated a blood transfusion which unfortunately introduced the AID's virus. Many others would have resigned to their fate quietly in the twilight of their lives. Not Kamalika! She launched a long battle for the sake of fellow victims. She went public and started a campaign through various NGO's to minimise the social stigma associated with the disease. She fought hard and finally won the right to provide funds for treatment of AID's patients through the World Bank.

Michael, her children, grand children and other close relations and friends could all feel very proud of what Kamalika gave back to the country and its people both as a medical professional and a crusader for victims of AIDS.

May she attain the supreme bliss of Nirvana!

Sanath P. Lamabadusuriya

