

Obituary

Dr Jasmine Nanayakkara - Paediatrician
MBBS (Cey), DCH (Eng), FRCP (Edin), FCCP, FSLCPaed

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It is difficult to think that Jasmine is no longer in our midst although some months have rolled by since her sudden demise in England in January. However, it is a happy reflection that her only child Seetha was at her bedside during her last moments, lovingly holding her hand and whispering encouraging words at that time.

She had an episode of cerebral haemorrhage late last year, leaving some neurological deficits which did not hamper her from communicating with us. Seetha was here but left at Christmas to return soon to take her hoping to give Jasmine a short sojourn in her home. But these wishes were not fulfilled as Jasmine had apparently been well for some days until she had a massive cerebral haemorrhage and was unconscious for a few hours before death.

I first met Jasmine de Silva working in Ward I when I returned after qualifying as a paediatrician in January 1956. She married Dr K J Nanayakkara to whom Jasmine's father had given the responsibility of supervising her wellbeing as a medical student. Seetha was born in Britain and the Nanayakkaras returned to Ceylon.

I next met her when I assumed duties as Professor of Paediatrics in 1966 and she was tutor in the Paediatric University Unit. With my new ideas, these "seconded posts" were altered to probationary lectureships.

Recognising her potential, I coaxed my friend, Dr James Farquhar in Edinburgh, to train Jasmine in neonatology. She impressed them with her diligence in acquiring new skills in the technology of that time.

She returned with the MRCP UK and I appointed her to be the neonatologist to the

obstetric unit at DMH. She was thus the first to be trained as a neonatologist. To the surprise of the paediatricians at that time, we gave up masks but changed our footwear and washed hands between seeing the newborns.

Prof. Forrester Corkburn was invited to the paediatric annual sessions in 1973 and added to the procedures in the newborn unit. The local manufacture of a phototherapy unit was his idea and this became popular island wide until new incubators with such a facility were imported.

Jasmine worked with me for twenty five years until I retired. During that time she was associated with me in some research. We were the "firsts" to demonstrate that G6PD deficiency was one of the causes of neonatal hyperbilirubinaemia. With professors Stanley Dissanayake and N D W Lionel and Dr E H Mirando, we worked on mebendazole to eliminate whipworm diarrhoea with blood and mucus resulting in acute undernutrition in young children.

She was a active member of the Paediatric Association, its President in 1982 and later Treasurer in the College of Paediatricians. She was an Associate Professor of Paediatrics at retirement.

She was popular everywhere with her gentleness and lovely smile, in the Faculty of Medicine and also had a lucrative private practice until her demise.

She was fortunate to see Seetha happily married to a long time friend, Dr Roshan Perera. Seetha is not alone, with Roshan beside her & Jasmine's family of sisters and brothers and their progeny. On behalf of the College of Paediatricians, this appreciation extends our condolences to them. She is missed by all of us and her faithful patients too.

Farewell dear friend! May your sojourn in Sansara be peaceful and brief. May you Rest in Peace!

Priyani Soysa