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SLMDA UK

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Special COVID Relief Edition

NEWSLETTER

PUBLISHED BY THE SRI LANKAN MEDICAL AND DENTAL ASSOCIATION IN THE UK
Formerly known as the Sri Lankan Doctors' Association in the UK
Registered Charity No. 800821

SLMDA provides emergency COVID supplies to Sri Lankan hospitals

The Association responded immediately to an urgent request made by the Ceylon College of Physicians (CCP) to provide much needed equipment and materials to Sri Lankan hospitals. Please read the full story narrated by charismatic Dr. Thushara Rodrigo (the Immediate Past President) who masterminded the SLMDA response, on page 2.

The Sri Lanka High Commission in London, the Association of Professionals of Sri Lanka (APSL), Hela Sarana and the Jaffna Medical Faculty Overseas Alumni UK (JMFOA-UK) and the SriLankan Airlines collaborated with the SLMDA to facilitate these donations. They are thanked for their wonderful support.

The first four pictures show the consignment at the premises of the CCP. The two pictures at the bottom show hospital staff at two district general hospitals receiving the donated equipment.



The Council 2021 – 2022

President

Roshan Amarasena

Vice President

Lanka Alwis

Secretary

Niroshini Nirmalan

Treasurer

Janaka Weeratunga

Council Members

Thushara Rodrigo

Roshan Perera

Suranjith Seneviratne

Prasanna Anthony

Rajitha Abeysekera

Chaminda Sellahewa

Kirana Arambage

Co-opted Members

Ajantha Jayatunga

Andrew Nayagam

Sati Ariyanayagam

DYD Samarawickrema

Alistair Solomonsz

Auffer Asver

Mahesh Nirmalan

Udara Kularatne

Harsha Jayamanne

Melanie Weerasuriya

Ruwan de Soysa

Manohar Mahadeva

Advisors:

Rasieka Jayatunga

Alistair Solomonsz

Champa Sumanasuriya

SLMDA's finest hour!

The second wave of Covid was raging in Sri Lanka. More and more positive cases were being detected daily and the hospitals were being overwhelmed by a stream of new patients. The already resource-strapped health system was reeling with pressures on space and manpower. The total ICU capacity which is around 500 to 700 was fast becoming saturated. In this dismal backdrop, on Sunday 9th May, I was contacted by the Ceylon College of Physicians (CCP) requesting us to send 1000 pulse oximeters urgently to help manage the COVID patients. I have been watching the worsening situation in Sri Lanka and wondering how SLMDA could be of assistance to our friends and colleagues there. The request from the CCP gave me the impetus to galvanise our organisation to assist Sri Lanka in her hour of need.

I requested Dr. Roshan Perera the Secretary of SLMDA, to call an emergency Council meeting on the same day at 6 pm. In the interim, I requested Dr. Kirana Arambage and Dr. Janaka Weerathunga, the Treasurer, to explore the unit price of a pulse oximeter before the Council meeting so that we would have an idea about the cost. While we could find the unit price on-line, we decided to find out the price from the NHS suppliers on Monday as that price would be lower than what was available online. As I had to organise the transport of the equipment without undue delay from London, I sought the assistance of Her Excellency the Sri Lankan High Commissioner, Ms. Saroja Sirisena. Her Excellency was very happy to support our initiative and advised me to forward the paperwork for her to get clearance from the Foreign Ministry. To put in place a reliable process of delivery to Colombo, I contacted the Chairman, SriLankan Airlines, Mr. Ashok Pathirage to find out whether we could airlift this urgent relief to Colombo free of charge. Mr. Pathirage was extremely helpful and graciously assured that whatever medical aid that we want to send Sri Lanka will be flown free of charge and instructed the SriLankan Country Manager to assist SLMDA in whatever way that was necessary. With the initial 'homework' completed, we had the emergency Council meeting on Zoom and every Council member agreed that the SLMDA as a responsible Sri Lankan charity should rise up to the occasion and help the health system of Sri Lanka through CCP in whatever way that is possible. It was decided to launch a fund-raising campaign to widen our efforts and involve the public, the Sri Lankan diaspora in particular, in this endeavour. No convincing or cajoling was necessary regarding a decision and by 7 pm, the meeting was concluded with unanimous support to proceed with our COVID

fund-raising, purchasing of 1000 pulse oximeters and sending it to Colombo immediately.

Next morning, a flyer appealing for donations was posted on the SLMDA facebook page, the SLMDA website and the facebook accounts of the Council members, friends, and other well-wishers. WhatsApp chat groups were 'highjacked' to display the flyer while 'Sesatha' web page appealed to its readers to rally round the SLMDA to help Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, Janaka and Kirana managed to purchase 1000 pulse oximeters at a very competitive price from the NHS suppliers and arranged for the consignment to be transported to the Sri Lankan High Commission in London.

To our sheer delight, donations started pouring into the special bank account created for this purpose and we managed to collect £18,000 in the first 36 hours. The SLMDA Council was jubilant....naturally!

Meanwhile, I informed Prof. Senaka Rajapakse that these 1000 pulse oximeters should be distributed to all health institutions in Sri Lanka in an equitable and a transparent manner as we were receiving donations from all the Sri Lankan communities in the UK and their only concern was that no region of the country should be deprived of this precious equipment. Senaka agreed wholeheartedly and informed me that the College will prepare a plan of distribution which would be shared with me.

With every member of the SLMDA Council doing their best to help our effort, our donation reached Colombo in a record time of 12 days from the Sunday we held the emergency Council meeting. We were jubilant to receive the photographs from CCP of our 'Gift of Love' being collected from the Foreign Ministry! Once again, a Flyer heralding our achievement adorned the facebook pages and WhatsApp groups and we were inundated by congratulatory messages. Seeing SLMDA's success on these social platforms, medical groups from the USA, Australia and Europe contacted me to find out the logistics of sending medical aid to Sri Lanka as they could not believe the speed at which we were able to fulfil CCP's request.

Dr. Andrew Nayagam was instrumental in contacting other Sri Lankan charities in the UK and was able to convince Association of Professionals of Sri Lanka (APSL) and Hela Sarana to make donations to our COVID Fund, while Dr. Mahadeva Manohar's intervention made Jaffna Medical Faculty Overseas Alumni UK (JMFOA-UK) donate to us. I thank these associations for standing shoulder-to-shoulder with us. Prof. Senaka Rajapakse and his team kept their promise and distributed these pulse oximeters to all the health institutions in all the provinces and districts in a very

transparent manner and shared the details with the SLMDA.

Following the success of the fund-raising campaign and the delivery of the pulse oximeters in a record time, we went on to donate 5300 NRB masks and 500 C-PAP masks to the College. We believe that we could make one more donation to Sri Lanka with the remaining funds.

I take this opportunity to thank Her Excellency the High Commissioner and her staff, the Chairman SriLankan Airlines Mr. Ashok Pathirage, all the

donors, the Association of Professionals of Sri Lanka (APSL), Hela Sarana, the Jaffna Medical Faculty Overseas Alumni UK (JMFOA-UK) and the SLMDA Council members for helping SLMDA to assist our beloved motherland during these dire times. Also, it was a privilege to have been in a position to organise and execute this relief effort on behalf of the SLMDA-UK.

Dr. Thushara Rodrigo
Immediate Past President

From the President



I am truly honoured and privileged to be inducted as the President of the SLMDA and would do my best to uphold the core values of this great Association, and pledge to continue the excellent work that my predecessors have done.

Through the years as a Council member, I have learnt how this SLMDA machinery works, embracing diversity and equality throughout the Association. This is supported by a highly talented, motivated group, not to mention the dedicated roles of the Council and co-opted members. Also to the great contributions made unreservedly by the equally dedicated spouses who are sometimes not so visible.

With this strength and support, I will be able to move forward with our core business, delivering the flagship project of book donations to all the medical and dental faculties and research grants to aid medical education.

I should also commend the very successful COVID appeal that in fact is ongoing as we write, in response to a request from the Ceylon College of Physicians.

SLMDA has exhibited its prowess and leadership and has been looked upon by our sister organisations as a trusted association to spearhead the collaborations. This is a true privilege, and we need to continue to support our motherland in this hour of need. Therefore, I have no choice but to bank on our flamboyant, charismatic, and sometimes seductive Past President Thushara Rodrigo who has this unbelievable galvanising power to continue with this project. Thushara, the passion you gave to your office was outstanding, I wish I have at least an ounce of this!

Finally, I sincerely hope that we can get away from these somewhat alien ways of working, I mean virtually, as I am from an era where online dating was unheard of!

Without being too prescriptive, we need to regroup for our live events and to this end I would like to announce that our Autumn Ball is scheduled for the 9th of October, fingers crossed. If we do not have another variant, we should be back to old ways!

I look forward to working with you. Thank you very much for electing me as your President.

Dr. Roshan Amarasena

The Top Team

			
Dr. Roshan Amarasena President	Dr. Lanka Alwis Vice-President	Prof. Niro Nirmalan Secretary	Dr. Janaka Weeratunge Treasurer

Two vaccine doses are needed for optimal protection

Vaccine	Alpha (B.1.1.7)	Delta (B.1.617.2)
Pfizer-BioNTech		
1 dose	49.2%	33.2%
2 doses	93.4%	87.9%
Oxford-AstraZeneca		
1 dose	51.4%	32.9%
2 doses	66.1%	59.8%

50% threshold set by WHO for vaccine to be considered effective

From real-world infection data analysed by Public Health England



Courtesy: Prof. Suranjith Seneviratne

Meeting Report

SLMDA meets with the High Commissioner

A delegation from the SLMDA met with the High Commissioner for Sri Lanka Her Excellency Mrs. Saroja Sirisena on Saturday 19th June 2021. As reported elsewhere in this Newsletter, the High Commissioner and the staff were very helpful in organising the speedy dispatch of emergency COVID supplies to Sri Lanka. SLMDA wished to thank the High Commissioner and the staff for this. The High Commissioner in turn conveyed her deep appreciation of the donation of medical equipment to the hospitals treating COVID patients in Sri

Lanka. The collaboration between the High Commission and the SLMDA was most productive.

The meeting was also an opportunity discuss matters of mutual interest. A wide-ranging discussion was held in a very cordial atmosphere. Several areas where the SLMDA and the High Commission can collaborate for mutual benefit were identified. The meeting lasted a little over two hours and ended with a reception hosted by the High Commissioner for the SLMDA delegation.

The pictures below are from the event.



COVID-19 vaccines

Organisation	Name of vaccine	Type of vaccine	No of doses (IM)	Storage temperature (°C)	Efficacy (%)	Approx cost per dose (\$)
Pfizer-BioNTech	BNT162b2	RNA	2	-70	95	20
Moderna	mRNA-1273	RNA	2	-20	95	37
AstraZeneca-Oxford	AZD1222	Viral vector	2	2 – 8	62-90	3
Gamaleya	Sputnik V	Viral vector	2	2 - 8	92	10
J and J	Janssen	Viral vector	1	2 - 8	66 - 74	10
Sinopharm	BBIBP-CorV	Inactivated	2	2 - 8	78 – 86	10 - 60
Sinovac	CoronaVac	Inactivated	2	2 - 8	51 -84	30

Courtesy: Prof. Suranjith Seneviratne

The Last Two Years

The Secretary's Report to the AGM

Introduction

This report covers the last two years. The current Council was appointed at the AGM of 5th May 2019 held at the Three Rivers Golf and Country Club, Purleigh for a term of one year.

The AGM

This was preceded by the Academic Sessions held at the same venue earlier in the day, at which the SLMDA Oration was delivered by Prof Michael Eddleston.

In the Poster Exhibition, there was a strong performance by the juniors with six Oral Presentations and eight Posters. The breakfast, tea and lunch was exceptional, being provided by the Essex ladies headed by the indefatigable First Lady Chanuri Rodrigo. In their response to an exit survey, 95% of attendees agreed that the meeting was well worth their time.

The AGM was followed by the Dinner Dance which was over-subscribed, and we had to limit attendance to 310 guests. Since the event was close to the Easter Sunday atrocities in Sri Lanka, a minute's silence was observed for the victims. A collection was made during the dinner and the proceeds of the "Cricket Bat Auction" was donated to a charity for the victims. We raised a sum of £2500, which was handed over to the **Foundation of Goodness** to meet the long-term medical needs of five victims. Music from *Sky High* entertained the dancers.

The following morning, the Council and volunteers were feted to the Presidential Breakfast hosted by the President and the First Lady in their lovely home in Billericay.

The Autumn Ball

This was held on the 12th of October 2019 at the Stock Brook Country Club in Billericay. The demand for tickets again exceeded our capacity, which shows how popular these events are. Once again, the President was able to secure multiple sponsors for the event as well as attracting some extremely worthwhile prizes for the raffle, making the event not only very enjoyable, but a huge financial success too. The guests enjoyed dancing to the music of *Exceed*.

Council Meetings

The following Council meetings were held during the last two years:

- 02 June 2019 - Dudley
- 14 September 2019 - Birmingham
- 23 November 2019 - Camberley
- 07 March 2020 - Woking

The March meeting was the last time the Council was able to meet face to face. At that meeting, we put the final touches to the plans for the Academic Sessions, the AGM, and the Dinner Dance 2020 and we discussed the plans for the Autumn Ball, but due to the lockdown, we had to cancel all four events. So far, we have been able to roll over the advanced payments paid to the venues.

Since we could not meet face to face and the AGM was due in May 2020, the Council held discussions via WhatsApp during the weekend of 11th -13th April and agreed to postpone the AGM, and all the planned events for the rest of the year, due to the pandemic. The existing Council agreed to continue in office until we could hold another AGM. This decision was communicated to the membership by e-mail.

On the 17th of October 2020, a Council Meeting was held via ZOOM, and we agreed to hold the AGM in May 2021, also via ZOOM.

On the 27th of February 2021, a virtual Council meeting was held and confirmed the arrangements to hold a virtual AGM in May when the current Council would be dissolved, and a new Council elected.

COVID Emergency

On 9th May 2021, an emergency Council meeting was held after the Ceylon College of Physicians had approached the SLMDA with a view to securing Pulse Oximeters, which were urgently required due to the upsurge in covid cases in Sri Lanka. The Council agreed to advance £10,000 from SLMDA reserve funds for the immediate purchase of these items and to start a special fund-raising campaign. We exceeded our initial target, but the SLDA is continuing to fund raise as the Ceylon College of Physicians has requested further urgently required items. This will be an on-going project for the foreseeable future. The SL High Commissioner helped with the despatching the items. The SLMDA is grateful for the huge commitment, enthusiasm and negotiating skills shown by the President Dr. Thushara Rodrigo in getting this project off the ground immediately under trying circumstances.

Projects

The following Projects were undertaken by the SLMDA in the last 2 years:

Open Spaces Project of Colombo Medical Faculty received a grant from the SLMDA. This formed part of the 150th Year Anniversary Celebrations of the Faculty and the SLMDA held a Communications Workshop as part of those celebrations.

SLMDA Annual Research Grant to encourage collaborative research by young SL doctors: This project is headed by Prof. Suranjith Seneviratne. In 2019/20, we awarded £1000 each to two recipients, both of whom have completed their projects and published their findings and presented them at academic sessions in Sri Lanka and Malaysia. They were due to present their conclusions at our own Academic Sessions but unfortunately those sessions had to be cancelled. The 20/21 awards have been delayed due to the lockdown. This is a very valuable and appreciated project that we will continue with and have plans to publicise the Award more widely.

Book Donations

The SLMDA continued to fund in full the Book Donations to all 9 faculties in 2019 and 2020 worth £1300 to each faculty, even though we did not earn any revenue in 2020. For 2021 we have decided to continue with the book donations but to halve the contribution to all the faculties except to the two newest medical schools at Wayamba and Sabaragamuwa. Prof. DYD Samarawickrema has to be thanked for his continuing efforts in this regard.

Other Projects

The SLMDA was very pleased to sponsor the Annual Academic Sessions of the Faculty of Health Care Sciences 2019 of the Eastern University of Sri Lanka. This sponsorship was greatly appreciated by this new University.

At the invitation of the High Commissioner for Sri Lanka, a delegation from the SLMDA met with her Excellency on the 19th of October 2019. We discussed how the SLMDA could work with the HC to enable more health professionals to seek training in the UK and how we may be able to collaborate on other ventures. This was a useful contact for the SLMDA, and the meeting fostered mutual trust and respect.

Sporting Events

Thanks are due to Mr. Ajantha Jayatunga and Dr. Auffer Asver for organising these events. These are more in the way of an ambassadorial flag flying venture for the SLMDA to make our brand more appreciated within the Sri Lankan community in the UK, as well as being good fun. These events tend to be cost neutral. The 16th Law Medical Cricket Match and the Sports Meet were held in July 2019 in Harrow. It was a white-wash: the SLMDA lost both the first and second eleven cricket matches, the net ball match, and the tug-o-war. So if there are any members who can add to the SLMDA sporting revival, please get in touch with Ajantha. If you lack sporting prowess, please still turn up for the next event and we could form a *papare* band and a cheering squad.

However, the SLMDA did win a consolation sporting prize in 2019: it met the Sri Lankan Golf Society - UK in a tournament in Oxfordshire and the SLMDA

won it and thus retained the **Jeeva Siriwardane Trophy**.

English Classes

Mr. Ajantha Jayatunga was instrumental in setting up English Classes to prepare doctors in Sri Lanka for the IELTS. The SLMDA did not incur any costs with this programme as it was set up to be self-sustaining. Disappointingly, we have not had a take up on this, even though a great many Sri Lankan doctors seem to fail the examination, some at multiple attempts which hamper their ability to get jobs in the English-speaking world.

Webinars

The First SLMDA webinar was held on 16th May 2020 titled "**Covid 19: the highs, the lows and the curve**". This was a timely event as the lockdown had just started. Ninety-five tickets were requested for this free webinar. The webinar was moderated by the President Dr. Thushara Rodrigo. The following Council members, Prof. Suranjith Seneviratne, Dr. Roshan Perera and Dr. Melanie Weerasuriya along with Dr. Chamara Warnapura were the invited speakers. There were many questions from, and interest shown by the audience, but we had to finally close the meeting after two and a half hours.

The Second webinar held on 31st January 2021 was titled "**Virulent viruses, viable vaccines and variable values**". The webinar was moderated by Dr. Thushara Rodrigo and Dr. Roshan Amarasena and had a very distinguished panel comprising Prof. Malik Peiris, Prof. Onn Min Kon, Prof. Suranjith Seneviratne, and Prof. Michael Muthukrishna, all recognised as world leaders in their fields. One hundred and sixty-six tickets were requested for this webinar. We were able to raise some funds through voluntary donations and sponsorship for this free event.

A Helping Hand

The SLMDA facilitated a fund for the benefit of the family of the late Dr. Malinda Dissanayake who passed away due to COVID whilst serving with the NHS. This was a private voluntary fund, but the SLMDA has awarded a bursary to Dr. Dissanayake's daughter who is a medical student in Sri Lanka.

GDPR

Thanks to Dr. Sati Ariyanayagam for ensuring the SLMDA meets its obligations under GDPR.

Membership Register

Also a very big "Thank You" to a true unsung heroine, Dr. Champa Sumanasuriya who has been working tirelessly in keeping the SLMDA membership database up to date. As you might appreciate, it is a 'fluid' situation, but Champa's indefatigable work has brought the data base up to date.

Gift Aid

Thanks also to Mr. Alistair Solomonsz who has been ensuring that we increase the value of your donations by re-claiming Gift Aid and liaising with the Charities Commission.

Other Tasks

The SLMDA Newsletter edited by Prof. DYD Samarawickrema was published in November 2020.

We are grateful to Dr. Andrew Nayagam who fulfils the newly created office of Returning officer – you will see him in action in that role in a little while.

Dr. Harsha Jayamanne, the webmaster must be thanked for maintaining the website.

Thanks are also due to all the other co-opted members for their numerous contributions. And my sincere apologies to anyone I have left out.

Concluding Remarks

Finally, it has been a great honour, a huge privilege, a steep learning curve and a barrel of fun in serving

as the Secretary to the President, the Council and the SLMDA. It has been a humbling experience for me to witness the enthusiasm and the generosity of the membership in rising to the numerous challenges whilst pursuing our core charitable endeavours. I must express my warm thanks to you all, both in and out of the Council, who have supported me in my office as the Secretary. I must say a special “Thank you” to the President Dr. Thushara Rodrigo for his unwavering confidence in me. It has been very edifying to serve under such a Captain, such a President, a *President extraordinaire*. It would be remiss of me not to say a “Thank you” to my wife who has had to put up with various interruptions to our domestic life.

Much work remains to be done and, the outgoing Council will join me in very sincerely wishing the new Council headed by a new President, much success in the coming year.

Dr. Roshan Perera

Immediate Past Secretary

May 2021

Lockdown Poetry

Lament the lost year!

*A New Year dawned with hopes and dreams
The Spring sprang with new life & leaves
A shattering blow, struck at the core
Humans caged by an unseen foe
Easter celebrated sad and lonesome
Summer blazed with bright blossoms
Nature's best, displayed unhindered
Where did our dreams go?
Where did this year go?*

*Human contact curtailed most cruelly
Cycle of life continued callously
Sorrow or bliss unable to share
Borne alone seemed unfair
No hugs or kisses to show we care
Thousands departed unable to gasp
Not even loved ones' hands to grasp
Buried, not forgotten they went
Sad memories of lives well spent
Where did our dreams go?
Where did this year go?*

*Seasons came & seasons went
The babes came & the dead left
Autumn colours, still at its' best
Chill in the air with a silvery fest
As a winter of discontentment looms
Forecast brings foreboding doom
There is such impeding gloom
Where did our plans go?
Where did this year go?*

*Cocooned home in isolation spent
Christmas alone is a sad prospect
That lost year we will gain never
The lost plans, will we gain ever?
From deep slumber, can we wake ever?
Will this nightmare ever disappear?
Where did our dreams go?
Where did our hopes go?*

Ravieka Jayatunga

7th December 2020

For the Diary: The Autumn Ball 9th October 2021 - Keep the date free!