

A tribute to a friend and a senior colleague: Dr Disna Sanath Liyanarachchi



Dr. Disna Sanath Liyanarachchi bade farewell to life, on the 8th of November 2025. He truly was a multifaceted personality and it is an honour and a privilege to walk down memory lane and recall some cherished memories of him.

My wife and I joined the faculty of Medicine University of Ruhuna and came to Galle from UK, in Sept 1992. Dr. Liyanarachchi was a Consultant Surgeon working at the Teaching Hospital Karapitiya then. In December 1992 the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Galle Clinical Society (GCS) was held and none other than Sanath Liyanarachchi was the President of the GCS that year.

This was a landmark meeting as it was the last meeting of the GCS. After much debate and discussion, the GCS was to be named Galle Medical Association (GMA). A resolution was submitted to the AGM in 1992 for the name change. Despite some discontent expressed especially by more senior members of the GCS, Dr. Liyanarachchi proceeded boldly to make the name change. In effect, Dr. Liyanarachchi was the last President of the GCS.

Dr. Liyanarachchi I am sure watched with pride the development of the GMA into a progressive academic body of a national level, serving the medical community especially in the South and the whole country in general. That AGM of Dec 1992 was a 'watershed' meeting in many ways. The first ever computer to be owned by the GMA was gifted at that meeting under the guidance of

Dr. Liyanarachchi. It was a memorable meeting for me as well, as I was entrusted with the task of being the joint secretary of the GMA at its inception under the able leadership of Prof. P.L. Ariyananda. I got to know Dr. Liyanarachchi well after that as a senior surgical colleague and a friend. Our friendship grew as we were members of the same cricket team.

Dr. Liyanarachchi was a very enthusiastic sportsman, his passion was cricket. He was the undisputed captain of the doctor's team in Galle and expected high standards from team members. He was a disciplinarian in terms of cricket practice. If you did not come for practice, you risked being dropped from the team. He was a talented batsman and a good fielder. He sustained couple of nasty injuries playing hard ball cricket namely, a fracture of maxilla while fielding close to the wicket and a fracture of the hand during practice. He insisted on playing after the fracture of the hand and got a special splint made by the orthopaedic surgeon to protect the hand in order to play symbolizing his commitment and unwavering enthusiasm. He did play with the splint in place!

He was thrilled when the doctors team won a couple matches against the strong student's side at the much looked forward event of 'teachers-students encounter.' He followed Sri Lanka cricket very closely. Dr. Liyanarachchi's sons Bimalka and Miyuru were his most ardent supporters and would lead the cheering at every cricket match. He liked to talk about cricket and would discuss tactics and strategy with us. When he left Galle and came to National Hospital Colombo as a Consultant Surgeon Dr. Liyanarachchi, was very much an integral member of the cricket team of the College of Surgeons and captained in for a couple of years.

He was a very active member of Galle Services Club and visited the club regularly. He developed a penchant for Billiards and Snooker at the Galle Services Club. He attained a very good standard. Professor of Surgery in the Karapitiya Medical Faculty at that time, Prof. Neil Fonseka encouraged

him and looked after Dr. Liyanarachchi's ward and patients whenever there were Billiards and Snooker tournaments.

His other passion was singing. He had a very good voice and was a regular vocalist at every event in the faculty and the hospital. He was adored by everyone for his singing. His neighbours would vouch that they could hear Sanath practicing his singing at home for various events.

He had a genuine interest in teaching medical students. He had contributed selflessly to the Department of Surgery of the faculty at the initial stages of its establishment though he was not a member of the academic staff of the department. He had his own terminology to describe various foibles of students calling them "hypothyroid, hyponatraemic duds" etc. Students have unanimously acknowledged him as an excellent teacher. He was a regular examiner for the MBBS examination at several faculties including Ruhuna, Colombo, Sri Jayawardenepura and Kelaniya. He was known as a fair examiner.

He was a gifted surgeon and had a 'very safe pair of hands'. He was known to have a special interest in paediatrics surgery. Early in his career he worked under late Dr. Michael Abeyratne at the Lady Ridgeway hospital Colombo where he honed his skills in paediatric surgery. He continued this paediatric surgical interest at Teaching Hospital Karapitiya (THK) and I know that children of a few consultants were operated by Dr. Liyanarachchi at THK, a testament to his skills.

He has trained a significant number of surgical trainees of the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM), University of Colombo. His trainees have all confirmed that he was an enthusiastic and committed trainer who demanded high standards. He was also a member of the board of study in surgery at the PGIM for several years and was an examiner at the MS/MD examination in surgery for several years. His active contribution to training future surgeons is undisputed.

In 2008, he was elected the President of the College of Surgeons of Sri Lanka signaling the pinnacle of his career and an acknowledgment of his integrity, commitment and the respect he had earned amongst the surgical colleagues. He worked tirelessly for the college for several years.

Being an old Anandian he was very proud of and loyal to his alma mater. He made it a point to defend the honour of his old school whenever the occasion arose.

This multi-talented person was a humble, affable, simple human being and a loyal friend, who would try to find a middle path in disputes and was always willing to compromise. He got on very well with colleagues both at Karapitiya, National Hospital Colombo and other places where he worked.

Being a devoted father, he was adored by his children Bimalka, Miyuru and Ruchini who will miss him very much. Dr. Disna Sanath Liyanarachchi was indeed a unique personality who has left an indelible mark in the lives of all those who met him. We will miss him and may our friend attain the supreme bliss of Nibbāna.

Ranil Fernando

*Emeritus Professor of Surgery
University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka*

Editorial comment:

A robust trainer, a strict disciplinarian, a unique teacher and a fair examiner for medical students and trainees, Dr. Disna Sanath Liyanarachchi made his mark in the History of Medicine in Galle. He pioneered paediatric surgery in Galle, despite being a general surgeon and changed the lives of many without voices. May his journey through Samsara be pain-free as he had wanted it to be for every patient he had operated on. May he attain supreme bliss of Nibbāna.