

Special Article – Anniversary Review by President, CPSL

50 years of excellence: the pathologists' journey from vision to reality

Professor Priyani Amarathunga

President, College of Pathologists of Sri Lanka 2025

The College of Pathologists of Sri Lanka was established on 15th March 1975 by a visionary group of pathologists with the objectives of promoting study, research and practice of pathology and fostering postgraduate training in pathology in the country. Three notable pathologists Dr Doris Peiris, Dr Ranee Perera and Dr H R Wickramasinghe pioneered in organizing the first meeting and Dr W D Ratnavale was elected as the first President. There were 18 members present at the inaugural meeting. The composition of the College at its beginning included histopathologists, haematologists, chemical pathologists, microbiologists and forensic pathologists, later most of these subspecialties branched off to establish their own professional bodies. Currently the majority of membership of the College consists of histopathologists.

Over the last five decades, the College has shaped medical education, guided national policy decisions and strengthened accurate diagnosis of diseases with an island wide laboratory service. Today, the College of Pathologists of Sri Lanka is a vibrant, internationally recognized academic body, with a membership of over 250 (in 2025).

The College has given priority to academic excellence right throughout. Academic sessions had been conducted from the beginning, discussing research, sharing challenging cases and up to date knowledge. A landmark initiative of these academic events is its collaboration with the British Division of the

International Academy of Pathology supporting biennial international conferences in Sri Lanka. The first such conference "ICON GI 2007" was held in 2007, and the 10th consecutive conference is planned to be held in 2026 in Colombo.

Over the years, the College has also broadened its role beyond professional development. The College has served as a respected national voice in policy and public wellness, particularly in areas of cancer screening and cancer diagnosis. Its members have constantly advised the policy makers of the Ministry of Health on disease trends and preventive strategies, helped in setting up laboratory standards, improving the diagnostic accuracy and providing equitable access to healthcare.

Today, the College of Pathologists of Sri Lanka has grown to a respected national institution whose work impacts every corner of the healthcare system in the country.

**The Golden Jubilee:
commemorating fifty
years of pathology**



Fifty years after the first meeting of the College, in the year 2025, the members celebrated its Golden Jubilee in a grand way under the theme "Commemorating the Past, Excelling in the Present and Aspiring for the Future". The cascade of celebrations commenced with the launch of the anniversary logo, and the year plan of celebration activities at the "Presidential Induction and the 50th



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Anniversary Celebration”, a grand event organized on 12th of March 2025 at Monarch Imperial Hotel, Sri Jayewardenepura.

Professor Priyani Amarathunga, at her Presidential Address under the theme of “Reflecting on the present to prepare for tomorrow”, outlined the significant evolution of pathology from autopsy-based analysis in the past, to the minimally invasive biopsy techniques in the present, facilitated by advanced clinical technologies. In preparation for this revolution, particularly in the context of cancer diagnosis and individualized treatment, she emphasized the need for enhanced multidisciplinary collaboration, rigorous adherence to standardized procedures and a proactive integration of emerging technologies such as digital pathology and artificial intelligence. The Chief Guest of the 50th Anniversary Celebration, Professor Neelakanthi Ratnatunga in her address highlighted the challenges in practicing pathology in the current era. Professor Chandu de Silva delivered the 50th Anniversary Lecture on “The Final Diagnosis: A 50-year Odyssey” highlighting the milestone events of the 50 years’ journey of the College of Pathologists of Sri Lanka.

The book titled “The Final Diagnosis: A 50-year Odyssey”: a commemorative publication documenting the remarkable history of the College and the evolution of laboratory medicine in Sri Lanka over the past five decades was published by the College. This book, a key highlight of the 50th anniversary celebration, authored and edited by Professors Chandu de Silva, Janaki Hewavisenthi and Isha Prematilleke and Dr Palitha Ratnayake was launched at the Inauguration Ceremony of the 50th Anniversary International Conference on 23rd October 2025.

Another key highlight of the 50th anniversary celebration activities was the 50th Anniversary International Conference, organized in collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, and the British Division

of the International Academy of Pathology, held from October 23rd to 25th, 2025, at the UCFM Tower, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo. The Vice Chancellor, University of Colombo, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest at the Inauguration Ceremony. The Dean, Faculty of Medicine, Vidya Jyothi Professor Vajira Dissanayake, and Dr. Jan von der Thüsen, President, British Division of the International Academy of Pathology, addressed the audience. The keynote address on “The shifting of sands: evidence-based pathology and the WHO classification of tumours” was delivered by Professor Dilani Lokuhetty, Emeritus Professor, University of Colombo, and the Head of the WHO Classification of Tumours Programme. The conference brought together over 235 delegates from 10 countries, 13 distinguished international speakers representing the USA, UK, the Netherlands, France, Australia, New Zealand, India, and Pakistan, along with eminent local experts. The programme included four special symposia, and eight workshops dedicated to past eminent members of the College in recognition of their dedicated service to the nation.

“Panoramic PathoVision 2025” art competition and exhibition was also held in parallel to the 50th Anniversary International Conference at the UCFM Tower. The aim of this competition was to express the science of pathology through diverse artistic creations. All categories of laboratory staff were invited to submit their creative work in a wide range of categories including paintings, photomicrography, poetry and prose, sculptures/wood carvings or creative crafts. An expert panel of judges selected the best submissions.



Figure 1. First place in paintings category: 'Dreamscape of a Pathologist' by Lalani J De Silva

This artwork envisions the inner dreamscape of a pathologist, where science and imagination merge. The sky unfolds as a lymph node in transition, partly reactive with vibrant follicles and partly shadowed by lymphoma, symbolizing the duality of health and disease. The landscape below transforms into organic forms reminiscent of colonic polyps, their contours softened into surreal greenery, while delicate fungal motifs emerge as intricate textures. Together, these elements weave a narrative of microscopic worlds magnified into a cosmic horizon, an artistic meditation on pathology's lens, where patterns of life and illness are seen not as fragments, but as a unified landscape.

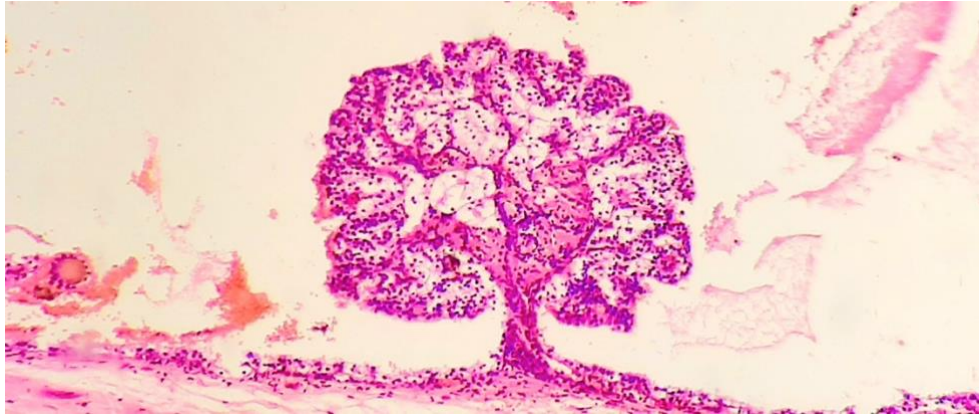


Figure 2. First place in photomicrography category: 'A Deceptive Tree' by Lalani J De Silva

At first glance, the image blooms like a serene tree, its branches heavy with life. Yet beneath this illusion lies the sinister truth, a renal cell carcinoma, a reminder of pathology's paradox. What appears graceful and natural harbours uncertainty and danger, echoing how disease can disguise itself within beauty. This photograph transforms malignancy into metaphor: a tree rooted not in soil, but in fragility of existence. It embodies the duality of life and death, serenity and peril, certainty and doubt. Through the pathologist's lens, beauty becomes unsettling, reminding us that appearances may conceal the deepest threats.

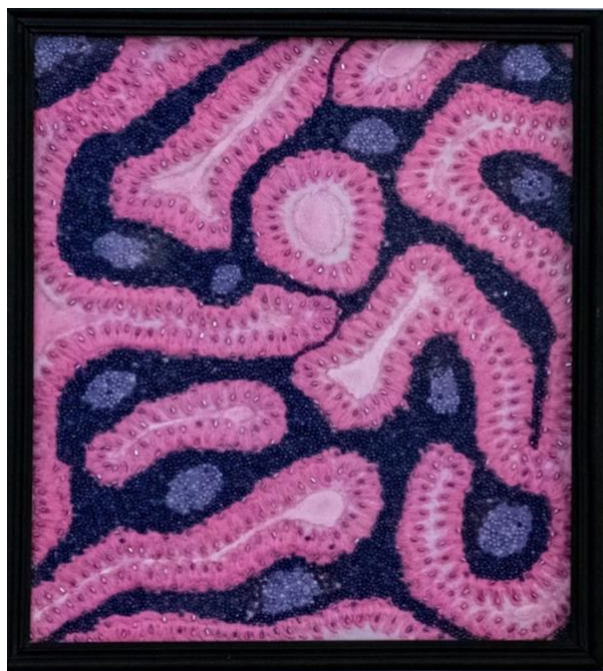


Figure 3. First place under creative craft category: 'Artistic inspiration of Warthin tumour' by Salpadoru Patabendige Ruwani Sandamalika Kumari.

Warthin tumour exhibits a uniquely elegant histological architecture, reflecting the inherent beauty of its natural structure. This hand embroidery recreates its artistic format. To represent the oncocyctic columnar and discontinuous cuboidal epithelial cells with well-defined cytoplasmic borders, pink cotton threads are used in blanket stitch. Cut beads are incorporated to symbolize the epithelial cell nuclei and sugar beads to depict the lymphocytes.

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Figure 4. First place in poem and prose category: 'අම්මා නැති ලොවක ඔබ තනි වෙයිද දුවේ' by Madhara Mandhodaree Rajapakse.

This poem is based on a true story of a 32-year-old patient who underwent mastectomy for an invasive breast carcinoma. She had two young children; the younger one was breast feeding. They had a poor socio-economic background. This poem reflects my experiences and sincere feelings when I met her husband and children.

“Path Master Quiz 2025” was the inaugural inter-university pathology quiz organized by the College to commemorate the 50th anniversary. The competition drew participation from twelve state universities across the island, including Colombo, Kelaniya, Moratuwa, Peradeniya, Ruhuna, Jaffna, Sri Jayewardenepura, Rajarata, Sabaragamuwa, Wayamba, Eastern and General Sir John Kotelawala University. After the initial online stage, the competition concluded with a physical round held at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo in September 2025. The host team, the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo emerged as champions, and the Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura and the Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya were awarded first runners-up and second runners-up, respectively.

Bridging the gap: laboratory-community integration and stakeholder engagement

The College also recognized diverse stakeholder engagement as of paramount importance during this milestone year. A workshop was held on quality assurance in the analytical phase of laboratory testing for the technical officers of all laboratory-related subspecialties as a pre-congress session at the 50th anniversary international conference. “Pathology Day” held under the theme of “Histopathology saves lives: the hidden language of diseases” at the Teaching Hospital Anuradhapura in July 2025 raised the awareness among healthcare workers on the role of histopathology in cancer diagnosis and prevention. A similar workshop was held at the Teaching Hospital Karapitiya named “Glimpse of Pathology in the South”.

The College utilized its 50th year to bridge the gap between the laboratory and the community. This was most notably achieved through Pathology Day 2025, held in Anuradhapura providing the public with a rare glimpse into the diagnostic process through

laboratory open days, educational booths, and live demonstrations of sample processing. Public awareness on cancer diagnosis and prevention were further emphasized by a cascade of activities through printed and electronic media. The College also utilized its social media platforms to engage with the public by dissemination of health education videos on cancer awareness. The College initiated a video competition among undergraduate university students on cancer awareness and the selected videos were utilized for public education via social media platforms.

While the Golden Jubilee is a time of celebration, the challenges and the threat ahead to the specialty were identified. In order to overcome the workforce crisis, the country is facing, targeted activities for popularizing pathology among medical graduates and career guidance sessions for medical students for selecting pathology related subspecialties were provided at various fora. The challenges faced by the country due to the “brain drain” was brought to the international stage during the International Pathology Day 2025 Virtual Conference hosted by the Royal College of Pathologists (UK) in November 2025.

The path ahead: navigating challenges and embracing technology

As per the theme for the 50th anniversary celebration “Commemorating the Past, Excelling in the Present, and Aspiring for the Future” our aspirations include advancing molecular pathology, embracing digital pathology, and integrating AI-driven tools into our practice. However, to move forward effectively, the College must first identify and address the critical gaps that exist in our current processes.

The National Guidelines for many aspects of laboratory management were published years ago by the Ministry of Health and the College of Pathologists of Sri Lanka. However, many of its recommendations are yet to be fully

implemented and now it is high time that we actively implement these guidelines. The collective action of pathologists, clinicians and medical administrators is required to implement the standard practices and upgrade the performances of the laboratories to international standards. The knowledge is advancing rapidly, therefore, sub-specialization and working in collaboration in a cluster system to overcome the burden on a single pathologist are timely requirements.

The role of the pathologist is evolving, and we are no longer simply diagnostic experts. We are consultants and collaborators, working closely with clinicians to tailor treatment plans based on individual needs. The revolution of artificial intelligence is upon us, bringing both challenges and opportunities for which we need to be prepared with a proactive and strategic approach.