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Editorial

Dermatology in south Asia: past and the emerging scenario

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It is estimated that one quarter of the world population live in south Asia. Most of these countries have regained independence from the West nearly sixty years ago. We share many common problems like poverty, population expansion, adverse climatic changes and urbanization. A number of health issues are also shared by us. Since of late health care providers in the region are facing many challenges. These include lack of resources, rising cost of medicines, lack of trained personnel and emergence of new diseases like the devastating HIV epidemic. Old diseases like leprosy continue reemerging in the health care services as in the past. Diseases like leishmaniasis have re-emerged and spread to unaffected countries like Sri Lanka in an epidemic manner. Caring for individuals afflicted with chronic diseases like leprosy and the vast numbers seeking relief for common skin diseases have immensely strained the healthcare budgets of individual countries.

As a specialty dermatology has emerged as an established entity only in the recent past.

General physicians and medical officers without prior dermatological training were treating skin diseases in the past. Some countries have managed to establish post graduate training in dermatology. Yet some countries like Bhutan rely on neighboring countries like Sri Lanka for the training of their post graduates. A center of excellence in post graduate training in dermatology is a long felt requirement of the region. Countries with established training programs should get together and plan out such a venture. This will ease the ever increasing demand for post graduate training by thousands of medical graduates who pass out from the regional universities. Ideally, such a center should also provide a comprehensive range of dermatological therapies in par with the best in the world.

Dermatological research in the region remains at a very low profile. Countries like India are playing a leading role in establishing this. However the research is still limited to few centers in these countries. This is amply reflected by the dearth of indexed journals published in the region. With regards to research in tropical dermatology much needs

to be done. No ground breaking advances have been made in vaccines, effective short duration treatment and in the prevention of disabilities with regard to diseases like leprosy and leishmaniasis. Fortunately The WHO still provides the MDT blister packs for leprosy patients. More collaborative work is required in finding solutions for the pressing needs of thousands of patients afflicted by these disabling diseases.

Recent past has seen the emergence of few subspecialties of dermatology. Paediatric dermatology, pigmentary disorders and contact dermatitis are few such examples. It is heartening to note the establishment of these specialties in the region and their acceptance by both patients and medical personnel.

The socioeconomic gains of our countries had led to improved living standards of our people. With improved buying capacity and with the advent of social media and advertising cosmetology has made inroads to our society. Many skin related procedures are being performed by both qualified and unqualified individuals. This has led to serious consequences on many an occasion. Clear guidelines need to be laid down as to who should do what and places with adequate facilities need to be identified.

South Asian Regional Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists (SARAD) was established in 1999 in order to uplift the standards of affiliated specialties in the region.

The main objectives of the SARAD as per constitution are

1. Establish and promote close personal and professional relationships among Dermatologists, Venereologists, Leprologists of the SAARC countries.
2. Encourage the common strategies towards the advancement of education, care and prevention of skin diseases, leprosy and sexually transmitted diseases in the region.
3. Promote research, training and mutual exchange of knowledge and data for the benefit and care of the communities of the SAARC countries.

4. Represent **Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology of the region in international forums.**
5. Organize the South Asian Regional Conference of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology every two years.

From the inception of SARAD in 1999, South Asian Regional Conference of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology (SARCD) had been a spectacular event. Respective countries have taken a lot of trouble in organizing this event which is held in every two years. Whilst facing many challenges in the region, this event has taken place without an interruption. Past three conferences saw vast improvements in the academic component. In 2009 sixth SARCD conference was held in Kathmandu, Nepal with the participation of 200 delegates from the member countries. Many a burning issue of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology were deliberated over a period of two days and important decisions were arrived at. The Honorable Prime Minister of Nepal graced the occasion. A Life Time Achievement Award was awarded in memory of late Dr. W. D. H. Perera for his contribution to the SARAD Dermatology. The seventh SARCD was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh in a grand manner with the participation of 291 delegates of the region. Vast improvements in the academic standards of the conference were amply evident during the past few years, and was graced by His Excellencies Advisor to the Prime Minister, Prof. Syed Modasser Alli and Prof A. F. M. Ruhul Haque Honorable Minister of Health. Many scientific programs in the form of symposia and plenary lectures were held covering the fields of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology.

The eighth SARCD was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from 1st to 4th of August 2013. Many internationally renowned speakers from UK, Germany, Australia and Singapore were invited as resource persons. Regional experts from the member countries participated as leaders in the respective fields of Dermatology, Venereology and Leprology. Honorable Minister of Health Maithripala Sirisena participated as the chief guest. Over three hundred and fifty delegates participated in the conference. The next conference will be held in Mysore, India in September 2015.

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