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SLJD - An Appreciation

Life and works of Dr. D. N. Atukorale

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The beginning of year 2015 marked the demise of a scintillating personality who illuminated the arena of Dermatology like a beacon of light. That is none other than Dr. D. N. Atukorale, Senior Consultant Dermatologist who rendered a yeoman service to health care services of Sri Lanka.

Dr. Donald Nandasiri Atukorale was born on 22nd November 1940. He had his primary and secondary education at St. Thomas' College, Mt. Lavinia. Having entered the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo he graduated MBBS in 1964. After his internship at the General Hospital Colombo he worked at Avissawella Base Hospital and Chest Hospital Welisara for few years.

It was in 1968 that he was appointed as a medical officer in Dermatology to work with Dr. V. T. Ratnayake, Consultant Dermatologist of General Hospital Colombo. The country was extremely short of Dermatologists at that era; Dr. Atukorale had to move to Jaffna to cover the Dermatologist's work after two years of training. After a stint at Jaffna he proceeded to Institute of Dermatology London, U.K. on a commonwealth scholarship to complete postgraduate training. There he excelled in studies winning the prestigious Chesterfield medal awarded for the best student, bringing honour to Sri Lanka. During the same period he was successful in obtaining MRCP (London) also.

After returning from U.K. he was posted to General Hospital Galle as the consultant dermatologist. At that time it was the only hospital that provided dermatological care to whole of southern Sri Lanka. He was instrumental in organizing the dermatological services there. After several years he was appointed to Colombo South General Hospital which was a fast developing institute at that time. At the beginning there was no place for a clinic; there were no beds for dermatology patients. However Dr. Atukorale managed to organize an exemplary skin clinic within a short period. He obtained few beds for the dermatology in patients. All those were not easy. At times he had to face tough challenges. With his amiable nature he was able to win the co-operation of the administrators and fellow consultants. When he was

transferred to Colombo North Hospital after several years he had to set up that unit from the beginning. Thus he was a pioneer in setting up several dermatology units in the country. All these units are recognized teaching units today.

Due to the extreme shortage of dermatologists his workload was heavy. He had only few juniors to assist him. Sometimes he had to work alone. Under whatever circumstances he never lost his cool, composed nature. Even at the end of a busy clinic he did not mind spending time in solving a problem of a patient coming from far. He received many referrals from all over the country. He spent time with the patient taking a thorough history and carrying out a meticulous examination. Sometimes he discussed it with juniors also. At the end he wrote his reply which had a class of its own, clear, complete, explanatory and educative.

He maintained a high standard of patient care both in clinics and wards utilizing the limited facilities available at that time. He was a mixture of knowledge, efficiency; understanding and sympathy when it came to patient care. Patients adored him. Staff found that he was a capable and responsible team leader, on whom they could always rely.

He was a much sought after teacher by the medical undergraduates. His lucid lectures attracted crowds. Students were delighted to do the clinical appointment with him. He knew the art of imparting knowledge and never humiliated the students. Even today those who learnt from him nostalgically talk about the dermatology appointment in glowing terms.

His contribution to postgraduate medical education in Sri Lanka is remarkable. When the Board of Study in Medicine was established in 1981, Dr. Atukorale was the popular choice to take up duties as its secretary. He served for a long period in that capacity. His illustrious service is still remembered by the staff. Subsequently when the Board of Study for Dermatology was established in 1995 he was the unanimous choice to be the founder chairperson. He effectively shouldered the mammoth task of organizing the training programme for dermatology postgraduates. This he did with Dr. W. D. H. Perera who was his colleague. They were united in their effort and worked tirelessly towards the progress of the specialty. Both of them were role models who deserve emulation by the juniors. Their exercise has borne fruit today. It opened the avenues for many young doctors to join the training programme and now the country has a sufficient number of dermatologists to serve all provinces.

Dr. Atukorale's role in postgraduate education had many facets. He was involved in planning the programme, conducting lectures to each batch of trainees, supervising their clinical training and organizing assessments and examinations. As an examiner he was fair and unbiased. He was the supervisor of many research projects carried out by trainees. His contribution was not only to dermatology. He was a teacher, trainer and an examiner in General Medicine and Family Medicine also.

In 1988 he was appointed to the General Hospital, Colombo (later National Hospital of Sri Lanka). It was from there that he retired in 2000. He trained many postgraduates during that period. Most of them are senior consultants today. Dr. Atukorale's services are much appreciated by them. After retirement he functioned as a honorary consultant to the anti leprosy campaign for several years.

He was a pioneer in establishing dermatological research. His research included some aspects of leprosy, hand dermatitis, atopic dermatitis and skin disease patterns in community. Various publications bear testimony to this. He educated the juniors on research methodology and evaluated many a research project of trainees

The pivotal role he played in the establishment and progress of Sri Lanka Association of Dermatologists (SLAD, later converted to Sri Lanka College of Dermatologists SLCD) is legendary. In 1985, at the inception of SLAD he was appointed as the secretary and was entrusted with the responsibility of drafting the constitution. This he did along with Dr. W. D. H. Perera who was the assistant secretary. He functioned as the secretary for several years. He was the chairperson of the scientific committee for many academic sessions organized by the SLAD. Most remarkable of those were the joint meetings with Dowling Club, U.K. in 1996, several joint meetings with German Dermatological Society and the South Asian Regional Conferences on Dermatology (SARCD) in 2003 and 2013. He was the president of SLAD for two years. He was the founder editor of the *Sri Lanka Journal of Dermatology* responsible for publishing the maiden volume of the journal in 1996. Thereafter he served as the editor for nearly ten years and later remained as the advisor to the editorial board. Whatever position he was appointed to, he held it with distinction and left his mark.

The honour of delivering the inaugural SLAD oration was bestowed upon Dr. Atukorale in 2000. It was a beautiful presentation which summarised his 32 years journey in dermatology. He was awarded a fellowship by the College. In recognizing his unique

services to SLCD he was felicitated with the "Lifetime Achievement Award" at the academic sessions of SLCD in 2014. He is the sole recipient of this prestigious award so far.

Dr. Atukorale brought much recognition to dermatology by his active interaction with other medical professional bodies. He was an active member of Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) and was the popular choice to be its' secretary during the centenary year, 1987. His organisational skills were amply demonstrated in the centenary academic sessions which were a huge success. Later he became the president of SLMA in 1998. He was a fellow of the Ceylon College of Physicians and was appointed as its' president in 1989. College of General Practitioners honoured him by awarding a fellowship.

Despite the busy schedule of work, he had time for charity also. He helped the poor patients in many ways. For a long time, he was closely involved in Saukyadana Movement and functioned as the president for several years. He enjoyed travelling to various distant places for health educational activities of Saukyadana.

However busy he was, he found time to care for his family and relatives. They miss him very much.

Besides everything he was a caring human being with lot of humane qualities. His demise has left a hard to fill void in the field of Dermatology.

May he attain the supreme bliss of Nibbana!