

Presidential Address

Furthering the Role of Medical Administrators as Harbingers for a Prosperous Sri Lanka

Induction Speech of Dr. B.V.S.H Beneragama, President CMASL (2019-2020)

4th March 2020

Cinnamon Grand Colombo, Sri Lanka

Prof. Mohan De Silva, Senior Consultant Surgeon and former chairman of the University Grants Commission, Chief Guest, Dr. Lloyd Fernando, Senior Consultant Postgraduate Institute of Management Colombo, Guest of Honour, Mr. Gamini Marapana, President's Counsel, former Ministers of Health, Hon. Nimal Siripala de Silva, Minister of Justice and Former Minister of Health and Hon. H.M Fowzie, Hon. P. Dayaratna, Mrs. Badrani Jayawardena, Secretary to the Ministry of Health, Dr. Anil Jasinghe, Director General of Health Services, Dr. Mrs. Sujatha Senaratne, Immediate Past President of the College, Dr. Rukshan Bellana, Secretary of the College, Dr. Allen Ludowyke, Treasurer of the College, All Past Presidents of the College, Members of the Council and the other members of the College and other distinguished Invitees, ladies and gentlemen.

I take pride and with utmost pleasure and privilege, stand before you as the 27th President of the College of Medical Administrators of Sri Lanka to deliver my Presidential Address. Given the present global crisis, in the wake of COVID-19 Pandemic, I believe that this is the best time to speak about the role of Health and role of Medical Administrators in the growth and development of Sri Lanka.

The development of a country is a measure of how it is economically, socially, culturally and technically advanced and encompasses the total well-being of an individual, a community or a nation. Economic growth and good governance, which are key drivers of

development go hand in hand and also combine a lot of areas such as Education, Culture, Civil rights, Health, Social Harmony, Infrastructure and Services, Environment and more, thus Health has a major role to play in driving development of Sri Lanka.

According to the WHO definition of Health, "It is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Therefore, Health is not just a measurement of development for us as a country, but also a prerequisite for a nation going through the major stages of development.

Sri Lanka adopted the "Free Health Policy" even before gaining independence and has been consistent in its progress ever since. Every government since independence has ensured adherence to this policy. The "Universal Health Care System", which was ushered in via the Free Health Policy has also prioritized the provision of Free Healthcare to all our citizens and as of now, Sri Lanka remains a country that is capable of providing the highest quality of healthcare free of charge to all her citizens.

Our vision as Medical Administrators at all times has been to build a healthier nation that contributes to its economic, social, mental and spiritual development. We strive to contribute to social and economic development of Sri Lanka by achieving the highest attainable health status through promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services of high quality made available and accessible to our citizens.

All these factors above have enabled Sri Lanka to be ranked 73rd position among 195 countries.

However, in light of the massive challenges that lie ahead of us with the Global Pandemic, I believe, that it is time to reflect upon our National Health System, bearing in mind the potential for Sri Lanka to develop a Health System on par with the best in the world through minimizing inequity, improving quality and safety and responding to the needs and expectations of the new generation and population demographics.

The final goal as the government would be to develop a people centered health system that is integrated both vertically and horizontally.

Apart from the challenges of COVID-19, we have also been battling other severe health epidemics within the country such as Chronic Kidney Disease, Malnutrition; especially among children and pregnant mothers. In terms of Communicable Diseases, Dengue and Tuberculosis have raised red flags in the country as well.

On a completely different note, Mental Health is also an area that we need to pay attention to. It is concerning, that Sri Lanka has a suicide rate of 14.27 persons per 100,000 population, where the leading causes of this unfortunate situation have been identified as marital disharmony, chronic disease and disabilities, mental disorders among many other factors.

A new Sustainable Development Agenda with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been established for the years 2016 – 2030. The SDGs are an inter-governmental set of aspiration goals with 169 targets that aim to transform the world into a better place by ending poverty and hunger, helping the environment, improving health and education.

In order to achieve these, we need to establish a well-functioning health system. The key components of such a system include Leadership and Governance, Health Information Systems, Health Financing, HR for

health, essential medical products and technologies and service delivery.

However, in the Sri Lankan context we have several challenges in establishing this Healthcare System, which include ageing population, the need for specialized hospitals, need for Centers of Excellence with state-of-the-art technology, rising burden of Non-Communicable Diseases, need for expansion of environmental & occupational health, food safety issues, diseases of poverty, neglected tropical diseases, re-emerging communicable diseases problems of nutritional status among many others.

Re-engineering of Healthcare Services in Sri Lanka since 2016 have included the “National Health Policy” and “Health Master Plan” (2016 – 2025), approved by the Cabinet of Ministers and the outcome of this design is to Restructure the Curative Division of the Ministry of Health, which should be prioritized immediately.

Under my Presidency, I endeavor to work with the entire membership to start working on the said re-structuring of Health System. I whole-heartedly believe that we need to unite as a competent, confident, committed, compassionate and caring work force to establish a responsive, quality, safe, accessible and equitable Health System in Sri Lanka. We are as of now, looking at a complete restructuring of services so that the Healthcare System of Sri Lanka can be uplifted and developed.

I state with great pride that the Medical Administrators are and will always be the unsung heroes of our most successful Healthcare system and undoubtedly the harbingers for a prosperous Sri Lanka. They are the professionals who are on the frontline as public and opinion policy makers. Medical Administration is a very specialized area that requires an immense amount of expertise and analytical thinking, aiming to harbor and uplift the well-being of the people of our fellow citizens. As the President of the College for year 2019/20, I am proud to have the finest

Health Professionals working with us as Medical Administrators and frontline warriors in healthcare to uphold the medical needs of our people. I would like to wish the College and Membership all the very best and hope all of you will strive to maintain the highest standards and implement accurate solutions to serve our Mother Nation to the best of your capabilities.

Finally, I would like to thank a few noteworthy individuals amongst many others all of whom contributed tremendously to mould my illustrious career as a Medical Administrator. I thank my parents, family and all teachers and mentors for providing me the guidance and support to whom I owe everything. Last but not least the dynamic Organizing Committee who have done a wonderful job in organizing this colorful and glamorous event of knowledge sharing, networking and entertainment. Wish you all a pleasant evening.