

APPRECIATION

A tribute to Emeritus Professor Narada WarnasuriyaRodrigo GDI¹  ¹Department of Clinical Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka**Article Information****Corresponding Author**

Prof. GDI Rodrigo

Email: ishani.rodrigo@kdu.ac.lk <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7640-4616> <https://doi.org/10.4038/sljms1.v2i1.50>

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Prof. Narada Warnasuriya, a beloved teacher, dedicated academic, and trusted clinician, retired from government service at the venerable age of 80 after more than 56 years of distinguished service. His final decade was spent at the General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU), marking the culmination of an illustrious career dedicated to medical education and public health.

Born in 1944 in Kandy to Mr. Ariyadasa Warnasuriya and Mrs. Millie de Silva, Narada's early education took him across Sri Lanka, finally leading him to Royal College, Colombo. A voracious reader, he spent countless hours in the school library, earning the title of "Library Reader." Even in his youth, he displayed a deep sense of social justice, co-editing the handwritten newsletter *Samasamajaya*, advocating for equal opportunities for all.

Although drawn to the arts, he was persuaded by his teachers and mother to pursue medicine, securing a place at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, in 1963.

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His passion for medicine truly ignited during a social pediatrics appointment, where he engaged with families and communities. His work caught the attention of Dr. Fred Miller, Head, Social Pediatrics unit of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, who visited Colombo as a WHO Consultant, leading to a lasting academic connection.

After graduating in 1968, Narada opted and was appointed as District Medical Officer (DMO) in Monaragala, a role that would have placed him at the heart of a rural community in need. However, with his father facing a serious illness, he sought a temporary deferment from this posting. During this time, he accepted an appointment as Registrar to the Professor of Pediatrics in 1971 – a decision that would chart the course of his future, leading him into a lifelong career in academia at the University. Years later, at his farewell ceremony upon retiring from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ), Narada reflected with honesty and humility that his greatest professional regret was not fulfilling his original commitment to serve in a disadvantaged rural area. If given the opportunity to relive his career, he said, he would seek to honour that early promise.

He commenced his academic career at the University of Colombo as a temporary Lecturer in Public Health, later transitioning to Pediatrics under the mentorship of Professor Priyani Soysa. Although he was awarded a prestigious Commonwealth Scholarship to pursue further training in the United Kingdom, government-imposed restrictions on career mobility at the time compelled him to decline the opportunity. Undeterred, he secured a registrar position at Newcastle upon Tyne, where he successfully obtained both the Diploma in Child Health (DCH) and Membership of the Royal College of Physicians (MRCP).

Upon his return to Colombo in January 1977 as a Senior Lecturer in Paediatrics, he focused on areas such as childhood nutrition, diarrhoeal diseases, and helminthic infections. He made significant contributions to the development of Social Paediatrics teaching and was actively engaged in several public health initiatives. These included promoting the use of preschool latrines to reduce geo-helminth transmission, introducing and popularizing oral rehydration salts, addressing vaccine hesitancy, particularly around the oral polio vaccine, and advocating for family planning methods such as Depot-Provera. Beyond these efforts, he played a vital role in training a wide range of healthcare professionals, including nurses, midwives, assistant medical practitioners, and Ayurvedic practitioners.

He played a crucial role in several national initiatives, serving as a member of the National Food and Nutrition Co-ordinating Committee, the Nutrition Society of Sri Lanka, the Medical Advisory Committee of the Family Planning Association, and the Committee for the Popularization of Science of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science (SLAAS). His pioneering work in pediatric endocrinology, alongside Professor Carlo Fonseka, helped facilitate access to growth hormone therapy for Sri Lankan children and led to the founding of the Endocrine Society, which later evolved into the College of Endocrinologists.

His unwavering commitment to social justice and equity was a defining feature of both his professional career and personal life. He was an active member of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party from 1963 to 1986 and remains a long-standing member of the Dr. N. M. Perera Trust. While not opposed to private medical education in principle, he has consistently championed equitable access to medical education and the strengthening of the state sector. His views on these issues are clearly articulated in his C.W.W. Kannangara Oration (2008) on “The Role of the State in Higher Education.”

In 1989, after 18 years at the University of Colombo, he moved to Saudi Arabia, where he served as a consultant and postgraduate tutor in Pediatrics. In 1996, he returned to Sri Lanka to join the newly established Faculty of Medical Sciences at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ), where he became the founding Professor of Pediatrics in 1997. He played a key role in developing the Family Attachment Program and was instrumental in establishing a community-based medical learning program in Kataragama. Additionally, he was a strong supporter of Prof. Leela Karunaratne in founding the first University Department of Family Medicine at the USJ. His leadership extended beyond academics, as he served as Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences and later became Vice Chancellor in 2005, guiding the university through challenging times.

His academic contributions were widely recognized. He was awarded the title of Professor Emeritus by USJP, named the *Outstanding Asian Pediatrician* in 2009, and honored by numerous medical and professional bodies, including the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM) with honorary fellowships. His work with the WHO played a pivotal role in shaping global guidelines on exclusive breastfeeding and child nutrition policies in Sri Lanka.

Beyond academia, Prof. Warnasuriya was deeply engaged in national committees and boards focused on education,

health, and science, including the Sri Lanka Medical Council (SLMC), National Medicines Regulatory Authority (NMRA), National Institute of Education (NIE), National Education Commission (NEC), and National Science and Technology Commission (NASTEC). He chaired the Sri Lanka Medical Association's Expert Committee on Alcohol, Tobacco, and Addictive Substances for fourteen years. Through these roles, he played a pivotal part in shaping national policies and reforms in education, health, nutrition, and science.

At KDU, Prof. Warnasuriya played a pivotal role in establishing clinical teaching within the Faculty of Medicine. As the Chairman of the Internal Quality Assurance Unit, he was instrumental in enhancing quality assurance processes, curriculum development, and the accreditation of multiple faculties and degree programs. Additionally, he played a key role in integrating SAIMT students into clinical training. Beyond his administrative and academic duties, he was deeply involved in student-led initiatives and academic mentorship, further demonstrating his steadfast commitment to advancing medical education.

A revered teacher and role model, he instilled values of integrity, professionalism, and empathy in generations of medical students. His teaching philosophy extended beyond knowledge transfer to fostering critical thinking and ethical practice. His compassionate care touched the lives of countless patients, many of whom maintain lifelong connections with him.

Prof. Warnasuriya's personal life is deeply intertwined with his professional journey. His wife, Iranganie (Ira), and daughter, Gayathri, son-in-law Jan, along with granddaughter Lara, have been steadfast supporters of his remarkable career.

As we bid farewell to this extraordinary individual, we at KDU extend our heartfelt gratitude and best wishes for his retirement, with hopes for peace, happiness, and continued good health.

Professor Ishani Rodrigo

Professor of Paediatrics

Department of Clinical Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, KDU, Consultant Paediatrician, University Hospital, KDU (UHKDU)