

## THE JAFFNA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

The Jaffna Medical Association celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year (2016). It is an Association of Practitioners of Allopathic medicine

Allopathic Medicine (also called Western Medicine) was introduced into Jaffna by the American missionaries in early nineteenth century, with the arrival of 5 members of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). Two of them (Mr Richards and Mr. Warren) have had attended the Medical College in Philadelphia prior to embarking for Ceylon (Present Sri Lanka)

They were followed by Dr. John Scudder, who established a dispensary in 1820, at Pandatherippu. His granddaughter, Dr. Ida Scudder was the person who later established the Christian Medical College in Vellore (Amirthanayagam Mills B). Dr. Samuel Fisk Green who followed Dr. Scudder established a dispensary at Manipay which later became the Green Memorial Hospital.

There was no training of "Western medicine" in Sri Lanka until Dr. S F Green started the Mission medical school. During the 26 years Dr Green worked in Jaffna, he trained 87 medical practitioners (Sivarajah N, 1998). The doctors for the Jaffna Friend in Need hospital (Current Jaffna Teaching hospital) was drawn almost totally from the graduates of Dr. Green's Medical school. (Sivarajah N, 1991)



Dr. S F Green's First Batch of Medical students

In 1840s the Government sent locals for medical training to Calcutta Medical College. Dr. Anthonize, Dr. Loose, Dr. Dickman, and Dr Ondatjee are believed to be the first batch to return to Ceylon and take up duties in Ceylon (Wijeyarajah C, 1982)

The Jaffna Medical Association is the first Regional medical organization to be established in Sri Lanka

The Jaffna Medical Association was started in 1941 as the Jaffna Clinical Society by Dr. S F Chellappah, the Director General of Medical and Sanitary services. Dr. S Subramaniam who was the retired Provincial Surgeon was the First President. The clinical society changed its name to Jaffna medical association in 1969 during the presidency of Dr. Kolitha Karunaratne

This was the formal attempt of an Association to advance medical knowledge among medical personnel in Jaffna. It commenced Continuous medical education of the medical personnel and public education.

To pursue this education it commenced a Journal.

The first journal of the Jaffna Clinical society was published in December 1953; The Editors were Drs. P Sivasubramaniam, R A Navaratne and S Anandarajan. The President of the JMA at that time was Dr. V T Pasupathy.

The JMA crest was introduced in the Journal Published in July 1954 (Volume 1 No: 3). the crest carried an outline of the Jaffna Peninsula, Palmyra trees and the traditional snake and an anchor. The Palmyra tree probably indicates that the JMA will survive and grow amidst all odds like the Palmyra tree. The words "AB UNO DISCE OMNES" was also inscribed. The Latin phrase means "Learn all from (the example of) one" indicating education through the showing of examples like in case presentations.

The image of serpents wrapped around a staff is a familiar one in the medical field. Cursorily, the symbol of a snake appears to be ill fitting for a healing profession. However the symbol is engulfed in Greek mythology.

The winged version of the staff is known as caduceus carried by the Olympian god Hermes. Another version without the winged staff and one snake is attributed to Asclepius. Asclepius is the Greek demigod of medicine.

Greeks regarded serpents as sacred and used them in healing rituals to honor Asclepius as snake venom was thought to be remedial and their skin shedding was viewed as a symbol of rebirth and renewal.

Serpents may have been considered as contagious diseases and suffering, kept in check by the Gods to be let upon the people by the Gods as a punishment for disobedience and misconduct.

However, the introduction of the anchor into the JMA crest is not clear. The anchor is usually a symbol used by the Navy.

The JMA Newsletter started in 1985. The first editor was Dr. N Sivarajah. (1985, 1987, 1989, 1999, 2002). He was followed by Dr. A Wijeyaratnam (1988), Prof N Saravanapavananthan, Dr. R Surenthirakumaran (2013) , Dr Ajantha Kesavaraj (2014, 2015)

The Newsletter was supposed to serve as a medium of communication between the members of the JMA. Unfortunately, the issues of the journal and the Newsletter have not been regular.

### **Annual Sessions**

The annual sessions of the Jaffna Medical association was started in 1983

The Jaffna Medical Association's song was composed by Dr. Mrs. Nalayini Pasupathy in the early 1980's and was first sung by her and a group of Medical students at the Annual sessions of the JMA in 1983

## **Other Academic activities**

Over the past few years the JMA has held joint sessions with national medical bodies and held several workshops for health care professionals, postgraduate trainees and a weekly clinical lecture which benefits medical students as well as doctors from the Teaching Hospital, Jaffna.

## **The JMA Library**

The JMA library is a major contribution that the association has made to support academic achievement. It has been always housed in the Teaching Hospital, Jaffna and is well utilized by medical students as well as many preparing for postgraduate studies. Thanks to the support of various organizations it is well equipped with computers with internet access as well a wide range of medical journals and books.

## **Social Activities of the JMA**

During the late 1980's there were several bombing attacks in the Jaffna peninsula. There were no NGOs or officially organized refugee camps maintained by the state. The people just went into schools for shelter. In 1985/86, First aid boxes were prepared by the JMA and placed in several places to attend to emergencies which occurred. There was also training by the JMA of the public in First aid to meet emergencies.

A video film on Health for Health education of patients attending the OPD was prepared by Dr. V Krishnarajah in 1986

A booklet on Cancer prevention by Dr. V Krishnarajah

JMA has been involved in several other social activities including the conducting of medical clinics in needy areas.. Unfortunately, records of all these activities from the earlier years are not available. The current membership should take action to develop a comprehensive history of the activities of the Association, it's past office bearers, collection and storage of all past publications etc for posterity.

## **References**

Sivarajah N (1991) Paper presented at the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the arrival of the American missionaries in Jaffna, held at Jaffna College Vaddukkodai on September 23, 1991)

Sivarajah N (1998) Dr. Samuel Fisk Green's Contribution to medical education. Paper presented on December 30, 1998, at Kulendran Hall Jaffna, on the 150 anniversary of the Green Memorial Hospital and issue of the commemorative stamp for Dr. Samuel Fisk Green

Wijeyarajah C (1982) Souvenir published for the Jaffna Medical association for the Medical Exhibition held 21-28, April 1982.