Cover Story

Patient safety is everyone's business

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Safety is one of the seven dimensions of healthcare quality (1). Patient safety is defined as the absence of preventable harm to a patient during the process of health care and reduction of risk of unnecessary harm associated with health care to an acceptable minimum. An acceptable minimum refers to the collective notions of given current knowledge, resources available and the context in which care was delivered weighed against the risk of non-treatment or other treatment (2).

As per the World Health Organization, 134 million adverse events occur each year in hospitals in lower- and middle-income countries, contributing to 2.6 million deaths annually due to unsafe care, and up to 4 out of 10 patients are harmed in primary and ambulatory care settings (3-4). Patient safety has been considered a serious global public health concern (5). It has been identified that health care has a worse safety record than the industries with perceived higher risk such as aviation. The global need for quality of care and patient safety first conversed during the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 2002 and resolution WHA 55.18 on 'Quality of care: patient safety' at the 55th WHA urged the Member States to "pay the closest possible attention to the problem of patient safety". Since then, there have been several international initiatives which have brought the importance of the matter to the attention of policymakers in many countries (2)

Sri Lanka has taken several initiatives aligning with the global agenda to ensure patient safety by the implementation of the national quality assurance programme while having Directorate of Healthcare Quality and Safety as the National Focal Point. Some of these actions are the establishment of adverse events reporting system, monitoring of hospital-acquired infection rates, conduct of training on clinical audits, implementation of the use of surgical safety checklists for all major and intermediate surgeries. The functionality of these systems had been

monitored by means of periodical reviewing of institution wise performance. Also, development of a five-year action plan on medication safety, a guideline on MRI safety and a guideline on CSSD are some of the important intervention, which is at the near completion stage, would have a significant impact on ensuring patient safety.

At 72nd WHA resolution, WHA 72.6 on global action on patient safety was adopted in 2019. This resolution had endorsed the World Patient Safety Day (WPSD) annually on 17 September to promote all aspects of patient safety including progress towards reaching milestones, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders (2).

Along with other member countries, Sri Lanka celebrated WPSD on 17 September 2019 and 2020 with the involvement of the wider stakeholders. It created a platform to highlight the importance of ensuring patient safety, take up the intervention in place to ensure patient safety as well as to share the best practices among the stakeholders. One of the eye-catching events that took place in parallel to WPSD was lighting up of monuments of the country in orange colour. The Medical Research Institute and the Lotus Tower ('Nelum Kuluna') were illuminated all night in orange colour to mark the WPSD to attract the public attention towards the importance of ensuring patient safety in the years 2019 and 2020, respectively. This issue's cover picture portrays illumination of the Lotus Tower in the backdrop of Beira Lake by night, in commemoration of the World Patient Safety Day.

Ensuring patient safety could be considered as everyone's business and both curative and preventive sectors will have a vital role to play by integration.

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