

Obituaries

Prof. Thomas Earle Joseph de Fonseka MBBS, PhD, DPH

Professor Thomas Earl de Fonseka passed away on 18th February 2000 after a brief illness. He was born on the 22nd of April 1923 and completed his primary and secondary education at St Peters College, Colombo following which, he pursued studies in Medicine at the University of Ceylon and qualified MBBS Ceylon in 1948. Soon after, in 1951 he obtained the Diploma in Public Health, London. In 1958 he was awarded the Ph.D. From the University of London.

After a brief period of service in the Ministry of Health, he joined the Faculty of Medicine, Colombo, in March 1953 as a Lecturer in Public Health and Preventive Medicine. He was appointed Professor, and Head of the Department of Community Medicine, in October 1968. He was elected Dean, Faculty of Medicine, Colombo, in October 1986, in which capacity he served until his retirement in September 1988. In recognition of his contribution to the University, he was accorded the status of Emeritus Professor, by the University of Colombo.

During his period in office, he introduced many innovative approaches to the teaching of Community Medicine, and the provision and monitoring of health care services, in the University field practice area in Kotte. He was the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Colombo during a turbulent period in the history of university education in Sri Lanka. He guided the staff and the students of the Faculty through these difficult times with honesty and integrity.

He made a significant contribution to organization of postgraduate courses in Community Medicine and in the training of specialists in the discipline. For many years he served as the Chairman of the Board of Study in Community Medicine of the Post Graduate Institute of Medicine, was a postgraduate teacher and an examiner. He guided many trainees in their post graduate research in his capacity as supervisor and during the period he served as the Academic Course Director for courses in Community Medicine, conducted by the PGIM.

Prof. Fonseka, has published extensively in national and international journals and has presented papers at many such conferences. His research has spanned diverse areas such as: birth weight, atherosclerosis, health education in hospitals, health information

systems and medical education. The paper on Indices of Physical and Organic health of Families, that he presented to the WHO Study Group on Statistical Indices of Family Health has been published in the Technical Report Series.

He served as the director of the WHO funded project on "Field research and management studies" and the WHO/SEARO Collaborative study on Mental Health in Primary Health Care. Prof. Fonseka, was a member of the WHO Expert Advisory Panel on Mental Health, the UNFPA project formulation mission to Nepal on Health and Family Planning and a member of the working committee on Medical and Veterinary Sciences of the Natural Resources Energy and Science Authority of Sri Lanka. (presently the National Science Foundation). He has played an important role in the formulation of health policy in our country. For many years he served as a member of the Ministry of Health working group on health policy and in 1992 was Chairman of the committee that formulated a National Health Policy.

Prof. Fonseka was a past president of the Sri Lanka Association of Community Medicine, (presently the College of Community Physicians of Sri Lanka), and was instrumental in reviving the activities of the association; a noteworthy contribution being the re-commencement of the scientific sessions which have been an annual feature since then. He was President of Section A (Medical, Dental and Veterinary Sciences) of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science and a Council member of the Association.

His contributions have not been limited to the fields of health and medical education. Prof. Fonseka's name will be well remembered by all lovers of Western classical music in this country. In this field he has excelled as a teacher, performer and musical director. He has guided and inspired many in the appreciation of music. He has been the driving force behind the Symphony Orchestra of Colombo and its conductor for many years. In recognition of his extraordinary achievements and contribution to arts, culture and drama, he was conferred the national honor, Kala Keerthi in 1988.

He will be remembered by all who came into contact with him, for his simplicity, kindness, honesty, integrity and the dedication with which he applied himself, be it to innovations in health care delivery, teaching, student welfare or to his beloved music.

Dr. W. A. Karunaratne

Dr. Wikramaratnige Ajitha Karunaratne was born on 30 October 1909, in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. Little did his parents realize to what eminent heights, this particular son of theirs would rise.

It came as a tragic shock to us, when we were informed that he had passed away on 28 June 2000. It was typical of the man, that he had requested a very quiet funeral, which a few of us were fortunate enough to attend.

I last interviewed him on 9 September 1999 on behalf of the Association of Former Staff Members of the WHO. He was as sprightly as ever and when I asked him the secret of success and longevity, he impishly remarked "A Glass of Whisky Every Day". This statement of his has been published both abroad and in our daily newspapers.

I have no hesitation in remarking that Dr. W.A. Karunaratne was one of the major pioneers in developing the excellent public health system that exists in Sri Lanka. He was a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians (Edinburgh), a M.D. (London), a Fellow of the College of Physicians (Sri Lanka), a Fellow of the College of Community Physicians (Sri Lanka) and a Fellow of the College of Medical Administrators (Sri Lanka).

He had been President of the Sri Lanka Medical Association. He was also the President of the Sri Lanka Medical Council, President of the Sri Lanka Association of Community Medicine and many other associations.

In the Department of Health Services he rose to be the Director of Health Services. He was a strict disciplinarian but there was a "human face" to his administration. I recall a number of health personnel including doctors informing me how he had helped them in their careers. He served the World Health Organization in the African Region in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Zambia from 1964 to 1973. He was the WHO representative for Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Since his return to Sri Lanka after his service in WHO, he has been actively engaged in his greatest love - Preventive Health. He was a front-runner and crusader of "Smoking and Health". He was the President of the Sri Lanka National Federation on Smoking and Health. His most recent publications were on Coronary Heart Disease and the Health Hazards of Smoking.

Till 1999, he attended all the annual sessions of the College of Community Physicians and even participated in our field trips.

He had a very happy married life. His wife "Joe" was the perfect companion and certainly the secret behind his success and long contented life. We shall certainly miss him. May he Attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbana!

Dr. ANA Abeysundara