

OBITUARY

Deshabandu Dr. S.J.Stephen
MS, FRCS (England), FRCS (Edin.),FACC, FACA, FCSSL(Hon.),FCCP(Hon.)

One of Sri Lanka's best known Cardiothoracic Surgeons passed away on the 14th July 2017 and his funeral took place on the 20th July in Australia.

Dr. Samuel Jeyarajah Stephen was born on 17th June 1929. He had his primary and secondary education at Central College, Jaffna. He entered the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo in 1949 and obtained his final MBBS with 2nd class honours in 1955. He trained in General surgery under late Prof.R.A.Navaratne and Dr.L.D.C.Austin. Susequently he trained in Thoracic surgery under Drs. A.T.S.Paul, T.D.H.Perera and N.K.G.Mendis. He also trained in Cardiovascular surgery in Hammersmith Hospital, UK under a Commonwealth Fellowship. He also trained in Cardiothoracic surgery in Germany, India and USA. He obtained FRCS (Edinburgh) in 1962, FRCS (England) in 1966 and MS (Surgery) in 1967.



After a period as Resident General surgeon in General Hospital, Colombo (1962 -1963), he was appointed the Consultant Thoracic Surgeon GH Jaffna where he served from 1964 to 1967. He was then appointed the Consultant Thoracic and General Surgeon to the GH Ratnapura for a period of 3 years from 1968 to 1970. It was here that in 1969 with the assistance of Dr. Neil Hamel who came to Sri Lanka with the Hope ship he assembled a heart lung machine which had been received as a donation. As a heart lung machine had never been used in Ratnapura, they established the safety of the equipment by initially operating on dogs. He then went on to close ASD's on pump. This was the first proper open heart surgery performed out of Colombo.

He was appointed the Consultant Thoracic surgeon, General Hospital, Colombo (presently National Hospital of Sri Lanka) in 1971. He served as the Chief Consultant Cardiothoracic surgeon, General Hospital, Colombo from 1976 to 1994. Following his retirement from the General Hospital, he served as Consultant Cardiothoracic surgeon at Sri Jayewardenepura General Hospital. He was a trainer and examiner in surgery for the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine from 1981 to 1994 and he was the Chairman, Board of Study in Surgery for many years. He was the President of the College of Surgeons of Sri Lanka from 1988 to 1989. He was the Editor of the College Journal in 1987. He was awarded the Honorary Fellowship of the College of Surgeons of Sri Lanka in 1991. He was the President of the SLMA in 1986 and President of the Sri Lanka Heart Association from 1987 to 1988 and the Vice President, Association of Cardiology – SAARC countries from 1988 to 2000. He was also a member of the Council of Cardiovascular Surgeons of Asia from 1976 to 1988. He was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by the Ceylon College of Physicians He also served as the President of the Cancer Society of Sri Lanka from 1975 to 1977. He was a Director of the Children's Heart Project from 1993 to 2004

He had delivered many orations. Some of which are:

S.C.Paul oration (3 times) – 1969, 1979 and 1996.

Sir Nicholas Attygalle oration – 1976

SLMA oration (twice) – 1981, 1983

Cyril Fernando oration – 1984

Sir Arthur de Silva oration – 1972

Sir Marcus Fernando oration – 1980

Prof.P.B.Fernando oration – 1983

Wijerama oration – 2006

He was awarded the prestigious title of Hunterian Professor by the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1988 for the lecture on “Changing patterns of mitral stenosis in childhood and pregnancy”. He had published numerous papers in local and international journals on many aspects of cardiac and thoracic surgery. He was honoured with the National Honour “Deshabandu” for meritorious service to the nation by the President of Sri Lanka in 1987.

Dr. Stephen was well known by his colleagues and juniors for his extraordinary skills in cardiothoracic surgery especially his closed Mitral Valvotomies and closure of Atrial Septal Defects under hypothermia which he performed with panache. He was always soft spoken and never had anybody heard his voice raised in anger, however trying the situation. He was always willing to help out his colleagues in Cardiothoracic as well as in other specialties whenever there was a problem. He was a popular and well loved consultant among all grades of staff of the General Hospital, Colombo as well as his patients all of whom swore by his ability and still continue to do so. I consider myself fortunate and privileged to have trained under him. I am sure generations of surgeons of all specialties who were fortunate enough to work or train under him will echo my sentiments. In the latter years of his life, Dr. Stephen lived in Australia with his dear wife Benitta (herself a well known ophthalmic surgeon and Professor in anatomy) and family.

He will be sorely missed by his family, colleagues and students.

“Say not in grief that he is no more;
But live in thankfulness that he was”

Dr. G.A.C.Amarasena MS, FRCS, FRCSE
Consultant Cardiothoracic Surgeon, National Hospital of Sri Lanka.

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