

About Professor Ravindra Fernando

The story of Professor Palamandadige Ravindra Fernando begins on 21st April 1951 with the birth of a child destined to become an intelligent doctor, a great academic, a teacher par excellence, a true friend, a faithful colleague and a champion of human rights.

Even in his tender schooling years he demonstrated academic brilliance. He was educated at Ananda College, Colombo and was selected the Best Student of the Primary school and Middle School. Following secondary education, he entered the Faculty of Medicine, University of, Ceylon, where he continued to demonstrate the same brilliance he had displayed in school, passing the 2nd M.B in 1973 and the Final M.B.B.S. in 1975 both with Honours.

He completed his internship at the National Hospital Sri Lanka, and then following a short stint at Base Hospital, Kalutara as a Relief Medical Officer, he returned to his old stomping grounds of the Faculty of Medicine, Colombo on 15th March 1977; this time as a probationary lecturer. His interest in Toxicology drove him to join the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology. During these early years he worked under the guidance of two illustrious personalities, Prof H V J Fernando and Prof Nandadasa Kodagoda. His journey through the academic ranks was swift. He proceeded to the United Kingdom for his postgraduate studies in October 1979 where he worked as a Honorary Registrar in Department of Forensic Medicine, Guy's Hospital, Medical School, London, under Professor Keith Mant along with a short 6 months of working as a Honorary Registrar in Neurology in the same hospital. Two years later he worked as a Registrar in Pathology in King Edward VII Hospital for a period of one year. He then returned to Guy's Hospital as an Honorary Registrar, Department of Forensic Medicine for a further period of one year, after which he came back to Sri Lanka in December 1983, being promoted to Senior Lecturer in Forensic Medicine, Department of Forensic Medicine, University of Colombo that same month.

His academic prowess earned him specialist status in general medicine

as well as forensic pathology; a feat achieved by only a handful. Throughout the years he has accumulated a slew of qualifications which include Honorary F.R.C.P. (London) from the Royal College of Physicians, London, F.R.C.Path. (UK) from the Royal College of Pathologists, UK, F.R.C.P. (Glasgow) from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow, F.R.C.P. (Edinburgh) from the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, F.C.C.P. (Sri Lanka), Ceylon College of Physicians, Sri Lanka and F.C.G.P. (Sri Lanka) from the College of General Practitioners of Sri Lanka.

His calm demeanour and clear concise teaching coupled with wit and humour made him a popular teacher in undergraduate and postgraduate curricula both locally and internationally. While forensic medicine and toxicology were his forte, he also showed a keenness to lecture on medical ethics, medical negligence as well as human rights, especially torture. In July 1996 he rose to the rank of Professor in Forensic Medicine and Toxicology and was appointed as the Chair Professor of the Department almost simultaneously. Five years later in 2001, he earned the status of Senior Professor.

Professor Fernando was instrumental in the development of one of the longest running extension courses within the University of Colombo; the Diploma in Forensic Medicine and Science for lawyers. This course ran uninterrupted since enrolling its first batch in 1995 has generated a strong link between the medical and legal professions and has imparted scientific knowledge to over 700 lawyers to enhance their skills in the prosecution or defence of criminal and civil cases. He has since initiated many other extension courses including a Distance Learning Diploma in Human Rights, Masters program in Medical Toxicology and a Distance Learning Diploma in Death Investigation for Coroners and other professionals.

He was appointed as the Director, Centre for the Study of Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo in 1997 which he initially held for two years, followed by a longer tenure from November

2000 to January 2010. In March 2001 he was appointed as the Chairman, National Dangerous Drugs Control Board, for a period of seven months, once more from January 2002 to May 2004, and then again from November 2015, a post which he holds to date. He has been an active member of numerous academic and professional bodies and has held many distinguished posts including, the President of the Sri Lanka Medical Association, President of the College of Physicians and President of the College of Forensic Pathologists of Sri Lanka.

He has to his credit well over a hundred journal publications and scientific presentations. He received the President's award for excellence in research in 1999 and 2002. He delivered the Sir Marcus Fernando Oration of the Sri Lanka Medical Association in 1990 on "Health Status of Tea Pluckers in Sri Lanka", which was the first time that such marked attention was drawn to their health status; the Murugesar Sinnatamby Oration of the Sri Lanka Medical Association in 1998 on "Poisoning: Dissemination of life saving information – Activities and Experience Over a Decade", the Medico-Legal Society Oration in 2002 on "Human Rights, Torture and Death in Custody in Sri Lanka", the Centenary Colonel Henry Steele Olcott Memorial Oration of the Old Boys Association of Ananda College, Colombo in 2008 on "Poisoning – A Modern Epidemic in Sri Lanka", the inaugural Professor H.V.J. Fernando Memorial Oration in 2013 on "The Concept of Grievous Hurt in the Penal Code of Sri Lanka" and Deshamanya Professor Nandadasa Kodagoda Memorial Oration in 2016 on "Drug Abuse in Sri Lanka – Past, Present and Its Future".

He holds editorial posts in many international journals such as "Medicine, Science and Law", the "International Journal of Medical Toxicology and Legal Medicine" the "Asia Pacific Journal of Medical Toxicology" and the "Journal of Forensic Science and Legal Medicine". He was also the Chief Editor of the "International Journal of Prevention and Treatment of Substance Use Disorders" published by the Colombo Plan in English and Arabic in 2013/2014.

In addition to his research publications, he has published nearly twenty five books catering to both the medical as well as non-medical community. His book “Management of Acute Poisoning” now published under World Health Organisation sponsorship is present in almost every medical ward in Sri Lanka and even after 26 years since its first publication in 1991, it is still the most sought after reference whenever an acute case of poisoning is brought in to the ward! Fine examples of his literary prowess for the public would be “A Murder in Ceylon – The Sathasivam Case”, which was followed up with “Sathasivam of Ceylon – the batting genius” and the famous case of double homicide involving Rev. Matthew Peiris aptly titled “Murders at the Vicarage”

Professor Ravindra Fernando is a global figure. His avid interest in forensic medicine, toxicology and human rights has earned him recognition in a wide array of international bodies. He has provided medicolegal service to the UK government as a consultant home office pathologist. In 1992 he was a member of the British team which investigated the Thai Airways crash in Kathmandu, Nepal. He has also been a member of many expert consultatory workshops and meetings in relation to torture and human rights and has actively contributed to numerous delegations on toxicology and environmental health.

This legacy he has achieved is through perseverance and deep commitment to his chosen field. He is a living example of a multitasking professional who has mastered the skills of a Scholar, Researcher, Teacher, Mentor, Clinician and Administrator. Inside this versatile professional also lives a loving husband and father; the role which he cherishes with equal dedication.

To the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, his second home, he will always be a legend and a role model to follow. His retirement leaves a void, yet his undaunted spirit, charisma and humaneness remain in our hearts forever!