

CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD OF SPORTS AND EXERCISE MEDICINE IN SRI LANKA

Dr Lakshman Edirisinghe
Director General, Institute of Sports Medicine,
Ministry of Sports, Colombo 07

In the background of a dramatic demographic transition in Sri Lanka, with the increase in life expectancy and the steady decline in fertility (2.13 in 2014), Sri Lanka is aging rapidly. It is projected that by 2020, 20% of Sri Lanka's population will have reached age 60 or over. Mortality rate, currently at 6.2 per 1,000 population (CDR in 2016), has been declining since independence according to published statistics. Sri Lanka is also in an epidemiological transition. Malaria, tuberculosis, Japanese encephalitis, diarrhoea, vaccine preventable diseases in childhood and acute respiratory infections are eradicated or controlled effectively except for dengue, but cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, diabetes, and cancer are increasing in an alarming trend. Tobacco, substance and alcohol abuse have also increased in magnitude over the past two decades. Child hood obesity is becoming a huge concern while under nutrition is still a problem in certain sectors of the society. Under these circumstances chronic diseases and diseases related to mobility leading to poor quality of life is becoming a public health problem in Sri Lanka. Although there is a countrywide comprehensive network of health care centres, hospitals and other medical institutions, with about 57,000 hospital beds and a large workforce engaged in curative and public health activities, whether our health system is oriented enough to address the emerging epidemiological pattern should be revisited by the all relevant stakeholders at this important juncture. In this backdrop there is a strong argument that Sport and Exercise Medicine will have to adapt quickly to take advantage of the broader application of Exercise Medicine in our system without delay. We will need to demonstrate our effectiveness in this area and usher a solution to one of the largest problems facing our health service today: developing sustainable prevention, treatment and rehabilitation models for chronic disease and conditions related to physical inactivity. This has enormous potential for expansion of SEM services, but not without its challenges as you will see once it is going to be implemented. We should be ambitious in our thinking when engaging with public health, primary and secondary care and other organisations which may offer opportunities for the specialism to be developed in Sri Lanka. Let's join hands to develop a stronger and a healthier nation.