Serozsha A. S. Goonewardena – surgeon, teacher, researcher and writer par excellence!

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Dr S. A. S. Goonewardena MBBS (Peradeniya), MS (Colombo), FRCS (England), Dip Urol (Institute of Urology, University of London), Urological Surgeon, Founder Editor of *Sri Lanka Journal of Urology* and Past President of Sri Lanka Association of Urological Surgeons (SLAUS) passed away on 10th March 2020 at the age of 62 years. Sri Lanka lost a man who served his motherland and its people with distinction, honesty and commitment.

Serozsha Anura Sahadewa Goonewardena (SASG) was born on the 18th of May 1958 in the southern port city of Galle. His parents were C.T. Goonewardena who retired as the Surveyor General of the country and Gnana Goonewardena. SASG was the sixth in a family of eight. He had his primary and secondary education at Royal College, Colombo. He was one of the few school children who got a double promotion for his

above average performance whilst in school; so he was one year younger than his colleagues of the same batch. He was an enthusiastic table tennis player at Royal College. As we found out later, he was a talented singer of classical English music. He displayed his musical talent every year after a round of scotch at the inauguration ceremony of the annual academic sessions of SLAUS.

SASG entered the University of Peradeniya in 1977 and was a silent student in his batch. He surprised everyone when he clinched a first class at the second MB examination as he never showed off his knowledge. He won the Chalmer's Gold Medal and C.B. Dharmasena Gold Medal for Anatomy, and was awarded a Commonwealth Scholarship during his third year when he visited the pioneering urologist the late Mr Joe Smith in Oxford, UK. His visit to Oxford inspired him to embark on a career in urology. He passed out with second-class honours at the final MBBS in 1982. Although the Surgical and Urological fraternity remember SASG's academic prowess while in the medical school, his batchmates at Peradeniya remembers him for his humane qualities. During university holidays after the year-end examination, when everyone rushed home, SASG stayed back in the hostel to teach and help his batchmates who got referred at the examination.

Following completion of the Master of Surgery (MS) training programme, he embarked on a career in urological surgery under the tutelage of Dr. Lakshman Atygalle, consultant urological surgeon at General Hospital, Colombo. In the UK he trained with Mr. N.W. Harrison in Brighton, UK and achieved the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. He was the first urological surgeon in Sri Lanka to be board certified as a specialist by the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine, University of Colombo in August 1991.

Upon his arrival in Sri Lanka, he was appointed as the consultant urological surgeon at Karapitiya Teaching Hospital, Galle for a short stint of two years. He was appointed to the Colombo General Hospital (the current National Hospital of Sri Lanka) as a consultant urological surgeon in 1993 and retired from this post in 2018 as the most senior urological surgeon in the Ministry of Health. I started training in Urological Surgery in 1996 as his first postgraduate trainee. I remember SASG coming to the ward at 7.20 am every day for the ward rounds. Though it was challenging for us to get up so early, the morning ward round was a blessing for the ward staff as all decisions regarding patients would be taken by 8.30 am and the staff could devote their time and energy for patient care thereafter. Doing investigations and referring patients was possible the same day without undue delay. At the end of a gruelling full day operating list SASG would always do a quick business round in the ward to see the operated patients without fail. This ensured unnecessary late visits to the ward to manage missed out postoperative problems.

His interest in research and record keeping was phenomenal. He understood the value of good research

and writing when research was not a priority at all in Sri Lanka's undergraduate or postgraduate curricula or teaching. He documented data of all cancer patients and other special interest conditions he treated and updated those records continuously. All those books are still stored in the cupboards of his ward at NHSL. Using those data, he produced many research papers and those records can be considered a gold mine for further studies. He inculcated his good qualities to his trainees through example and whenever I published an article, SASG was among the first few to read the article and send comments. He was never afraid to criticise even his best student but was very generous whenever he saw good research and writing. Some of the e-mails he sent have been preserved for posterity by me to learn English vocabulary and style! Even after his retirement he continued to publish and sent me useful articles whenever he came across such. He had a special penchant for history of surgery and urology in Sri Lanka. He wanted me to prepare a bibliography of publications related to urological surgery in Sri Lanka. Because of his relentless persuasion, I started the project with help from Professor Channa Ratnatunga and SASG himself. After laborious efforts over several months, we managed to finalise the script which was approved by SASG. The printers delivered the printed copies only on the 13th of March, two days after SASG's death. Most likely that was his last academic project and I am sad that I could not show the printed copy to him! All I could do was to give copies of the publication to his wife Sandhya, Sister Nevanka, brother Maitree and two daughters – Dilhani and Nadeeshani after the funeral was over.

During the 1990/1991 period when SASG associated senior urologists at Institute of Urology, London, he realised the importance of establishing an association for urologists back in Sri Lanka. After his return to Sri Lanka he started the KUBs Club as an academic event for urologists and trainees. As a senior registrar in urology I made the first presentation on renal cell carcinoma at the inaugural meeting of the KUBs club. Taking the cue from this, SASG started writing a constitution for his dream project – Sri Lanka Association of Urological Surgeons (SLAUS). The birth of SLAUS was on 18th December 1999 and the inaugural meeting was held at Galadari Hotel. SASG functioned as the founder secretary of SLAUS and the invitation cards for academic events hand-written by SASG himself during the initial years which are still with me, is clear evidence for his commitment to the association. He became the President of SLAUS in 2008, and a joint meeting was held with the Royal Society of Medicine during his tenure which paved the way for collaborations with European Urological experts.

SASG will be remembered and appreciated for the scientific and academic aspect he embellished the surgical sphere with. He was an avid reader who was up-to-date on knowledge in urology and his trainer Dr L. S. Attygalle used to call him a walking encyclopaedia. Any scientific meeting in urology without his presence in the audience was a curry without salt! He was a prolific researcher and writer with publications in numerous national and international journals, and the Editor of the Sri Lanka Journal of Surgery, and the Sri Lanka Journal of Urology for many years. Many urological surgeons, surgical trainees, and medical and allied health students, have benefitted from his incredible knowledge and memory. His dedication to whatever professional activity he took up was absolute. When he was a postgraduate examiner at MD (Surgery) part II examination and set the theory question, he cancelled private practice for one week and spend time correcting the answer scripts with diligence and attention. I am not aware of any such commitment made by an examiner at postgraduate examinations in this country.

He was undoubtedly one of the most academically inclined surgeons in Sri Lanka, and stood shoulder to shoulder with academics of the international community, who respected and admired him. Mr Mark Speakman, a past president of the British Association of Urological Surgeons, after hearing the demise of SASG sent a message saying "it is a very great loss to world and especially Sri Lankan urology. I always felt he was one of the cleverest urologists I had ever met and such a wonderfully modest man". Mr Julian Shah the reputed Urological Surgeon from UK who has attended SLAUS academic sessions every year for the last eight years would listen only to SASG and none others on controversial academic matters. That was the level of respect SASG had for his knowledge and experience in urological surgery. Even up till a few weeks before his untimely death, SASG could be found immersed in books at the Sri Lanka Medical Library. Such was his thirst to educate himself and to pass this teaching to others.

He was a kind, caring doctor who respected and gave dignity to his patients, immaterial of who they were. Many presidents, prime ministers, and other VIPs have been treated in his wards, and they all received the same treatment, as would any other citizen of our country, whoever they were or wherever they came from. SASG never showed bias whatsoever on gender, ethnicity or religion issues during his professional life. He ensured that patients of all groups were treated fairly and equally in his unit. On many occasions he reiterated to his trainees that the way to respect him as a teacher was to uphold and practice his key principles of altruistic patient care and rigorous research.

Though he was a tough disciplinarian he was very kind and sympathetic to all staff members of the unit and the operating room. He spoke to them with lot of respect and dignity. The junior level staff adored him and at his retirement day speech, the people he thanked mostly were the junior level health care assistants showing he was a boss who believed in equity. He looked after his team through thick and thin – through childbirths, weddings, conflicts with other units, deaths etc. he was even better than a best friend or a family member in this regard.

But one of the most important aspects that he was admired for was his honesty, integrity and values. If he believed that something was right, he would fight tenaciously for that, whatever the personal costs to him. His constant battle to challenge the administration against the practice of keeping prison hospital patients shackled to bed railings, and the demand from the government to ensure hospital beds for each and every patient in wards to eliminate floor patients, are a few of the many issues he took up.

When I was the Senior Registrar in his unit there was a militant prisoner who was warded in the unit for urethral stricture surgery. When SASG came for the ward rounds, the patient was shackled to the bed. SASG refused to see the patient until the shackles were removed saying according to the Geneva convention and ethical practices of patient care, no patient should be shackled while medical care is given in a hospital. Though the prison officials were adamant stating that he was a very high-risk suspect, SASG did not budge. He went on to complain and raise this matter with the Director General of Health Services and the Commissioner of Prisons. He even went so far as to write a letter that was published in the Ceylon Medical Journal. That was his character and force for fairness. Throughout his professional life he wanted every state hospital patient to be given a bed. He never allowed 'floor patients' in his ward. In the latter part of his life he allocated some of the beds in his ward to another speciality as those patients did not have dedicated ward beds.

He had a few idiosyncrasies that made him unpopular among the common on certain occasions. He was a perfectionist who would never compromise, and in this world of uncertainty and relativity, this was a thorn that irritated him throughout his life. He embarked on writing an exhaustive book on Sri Lankan Surgeons of the pre-independence era. He collected most of the information and documents necessary which was enough for an ordinary writer to complete the book.

Being a perfectionist, he was not contented with that and the masterpiece never became a reality.

He adored his two daughters and called them the right and left eyes of his. When both daughters were abroad for higher studies he wrote “Without my two eyes I cannot see properly!” SASG never wanted them to be famous professionals though they have done well to be a medical doctor in Sri Lanka and a microbiologist at Mayo clinic, USA. All he wanted for them was to be fearless, honest and kind people who would help other fellow citizens.

After his retirement he wanted to learn Abhidhamma, the most complex philosophical segment of Theravada Buddhism and during his life he was a true practitioner of equanimity and non-greed. SASG never claimed extra

duty allowances or obtained the car permit which he was duly entitled to during his entire career. I must say it is unheard of government officers in Sri Lanka not to claim the retirement car permit. When inquired about this, SASG said that his blue coloured Maruti 800 (19-4899) was still motorable though he had used it for over 25 years. What greater contentment can we expect from a Consultant Surgeon of this country! Due to his quality of non-greed and non-attachment, his mind was very calm even during his last days at the Cardiology ICU after developing an extensive myocardial infarction. Despite having several tubes and lines connected to his body and lying supine for several days, he never complained of any discomfort or resentment. He was calm and non-reactive which made me think how non-attached SASG was to his body and life. May he attain Nibbana!