

Dr. NADARAJAH SIVARAJAH MEMORIAL LECTURE 2024

Humanities in Medical Education: Current and Future



By

Professor Saroj Jayasinghe

Emeritus Professor of Medicine , University of Colombo

6th March 2024



University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka

Dr. Nadarajah Sivarajah Memorial Lecture 2024

**Humanities in Medical Education:
Current and Future**

By:
Professor Saroj Jayasinghe
Emeritus Professor of Medicine
University of Colombo

6th March 2024

Dr.Nadarajah Sivarajah Memorial Lecture 2024

Vice Chancellor's Message

Late Dr. N. Sivarajah is celebrated as a prominent figure in public health and a leading force in Community Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine. His substantial contributions to advancing Public Health and Primary Health Care in the region are widely acknowledged. Dr. Sivarajah exhibited exemplary dedication by balancing academic duties, community healthcare, and consultancy roles for WHO, UNFPA and many other institutions during challenging times. Known for his commitment to serving underserved and marginalised communities, he remains a role model for many professionals in the field. In recognition of his remarkable service to the institution and the community, the Senate of the University of Jaffna established an annual memorial lecture series in his honour.

Saroj Jayasinghe, Emeritus Professor of Medicine at the University of Colombo, has an illustrious academic background. He obtained his MBBS (Hons) in 1979 and holds three doctorates: MD in General Medicine from the University of Colombo, MD by research from the University of Bristol, and a PhD from the Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo. Additionally, he passed the MRCP (UK) and received Fellowships from prestigious institutions including the Royal College of Physicians (London) and the National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka.

This title aptly reflects the growing recognition of the role of humanities in shaping compassionate and empathetic healthcare professionals, making it relevant for the current discourse on medical education. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to Emeritus Professor Saroj Jayasinghe for your willingness to share your expertise and deliver the Dr. Nadarajah Sivarajah Memorial Lecture 2024. The lecture's multifaceted perspective on humanities in education makes it valuable for individuals seeking to broaden their knowledge and skills beyond their specific domains.

Prof. S.Srisatkunarajah

B.Sc(Hons) Jaffna,PGDE(Merit)OUSL

Ph.D Heriot-Watt

Professor in Mathematics

Vice Chancellor

University of Jaffna

Dr.Nadarajah Sivarajah Memorial Lecture 2024

Humanities in Medical Education: Current and Future

Saroj Jayasinghe, Emeritus Professor of Medicine, Founder Head, Department of Medical Humanities, University of Colombo

Vice Chancellor, the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, members of Dr. Nadarajah Sivarajah's family, friends, colleagues, and students, I thank the Faculty of Medicine and the University of Jaffna for inviting me to deliver the Dr. Nadarajah Sivarajah Memorial Lecture.

Having read about Dr. Sivarajah's life and spoken to those who knew him, what strikes me most is his 'gentle dedication and unwavering commitment' to help the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, and the voiceless. He did so without expecting any favors or accolades in return, and his work shows a striking pattern seen in an altruistic, compassionate, and humane person.

Dr. Sivarajah was a key figure in the Association for Rehabilitation of the Disabled (AROD) to help those who were affected by injuries and other forms of defects. He tenaciously studied childhood nutritional status during the conflict and exposed the truth of a crisis in nutrition to the rest of the country and the world, way back in 2000. He then became the President of the CANE Jaffna Hospice, helping those in the

terminal stages of their lives, often from cancers. He also founded another NGO dedicated to public education the Association for Health and Education Development which continues to function to this day.

Dr. Sivarajah helped develop a night ambulance service in Jaffna in 2006, at a time when the area was in conflict and injuries were frequent. He ensured polio vaccination during the conflict and succeeded where others failed. As a result, immunization went ahead for the most vulnerable groups affected by the conflicts. In another instance, he prevented a boycott of the Advanced Level Examination initiated by an armed group. In his own words, he says... 'As Tamils, we have placed a lot of faith in education. If we interrupt education, everything will collapse. And that was one turning point, I think. If we had allowed that, today there wouldn't be a university, there wouldn't be anything.'

I was impressed by Dr. Sivarajah's pattern of empathy, compassion, and altruism and wish to dedicate the 4th Memorial Lecture to explore these themes further, and attempt to answer five key questions:

- a. Is it necessary to instil compassion and empathy in healthcare professionals?
- b. Can empathy and compassion be developed or nurtured?
- c. Is there a role for the arts in fostering empathy and compassion among healthcare professionals?

- d. What are the experiences of other countries in the region?
- e. Moving forward: Lessons from the Colombo Experience

Sympathy, empathy, and compassion are a family of connected mental states or emotions that relate to understanding and responding to another's feelings. Compassion can be defined as a feeling that arises when witnessing another's suffering and motivates a desire to help. It differs from empathy, which is experiencing another's feelings, and sympathy (a feeling of sorrow and concern for another's pain or suffering). Altruism is the attitude of caring about others and helping them without expecting anything in return. Measuring compassion and altruism is difficult, and most research is on empathy in relation to medical education.

a. Is it necessary to instil compassion and empathy in healthcare professionals?

Is it necessary to instil compassion and empathy in healthcare professionals? Yes, it is. Patients consistently rate kindness by doctors as an important characteristic to have. Moreover, empirical studies demonstrate that empathy not only enhances patient satisfaction but also yields tangible benefits such as improved health outcomes, including better glycaemic control in patients with diabetes, heightened diagnostic accuracy, and enhanced drug compliance. Research also highlights a concerning trend: a rapid decline in empathy observed during undergraduate medical courses. Therefore, we need to take

corrective action, at least to reverse this trend of educating health professionals to be less humane!

b. Can empathy and compassion be developed or nurtured?

Can empathy and compassion be developed or nurtured? Research suggests that cultivating these qualities is indeed possible, and there are universities such as Stanford that run courses on cultivating compassion. A supportive environment, the presence of positive role models, and engaging in reflective practices all contribute to their development.

Given below is the Colombo Model of developing a more humane health professional. It shows the roles played by several interventions in the curriculum that could foster compassion in the learner.

- Narrative-Based Learning: Provides insight into the human dimension of illness.
- Emotional Intelligence: Enhances understanding of both others' and one's own emotions.
- Mindfulness and Meditation: Encourages introspection and self-reflection.
- Religion: Can influence compassionate behaviours through narratives and teachings that exemplify empathy and compassion.
- The Arts and Humanities: Increasingly utilized to foster empathy and compassion in healthcare professionals.

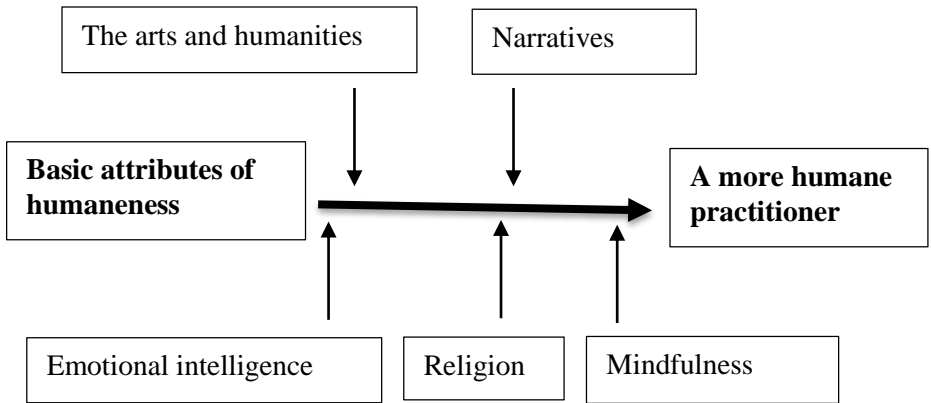


Figure 1: The Colombo Model of Developing a more Humane Health Professional

c. Is there a role for the arts and humanities to foster compassion in healthcare professionals?

Evidence indicates that such exposure during medical education and training is effective in shaping empathetic and compassionate physicians. Medical humanities, an interdisciplinary field that integrates disciplines such as art, creative writing, drama, and anthropology into medical education, offers various strategies to enhance empathy and compassion.

d. What are the experiences of other countries in the region?

In a recent scoping review, we delved into the role of the arts in medical education across the South-East Asia Region as

designated by the World Health Organization (SEARO of WHO). Our findings revealed a diverse array of artistic mediums being integrated into Medical Humanities courses. Refer to the table below for select examples drawn from the literature.

Art Form	Activities in the Curriculum
Visual art	Visual art is used to improve observational skills and promote empathy. Visual Thinking Strategy is one such approach. which is used to think more critically and systematically about images, based around 3 open-ended questions: What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can you find
Creative writing and poetry	Students write, share, recite and discuss creative stories or poems written about their impactful experiences.
Story Telling	Through first-hand experiences, storytelling facilitates understanding of different perspectives of people. For example, stories on experienced of visible and/or invisible disabilities and their caregivers.

Theatre	Forum Theatre is a large group session which is participatory, in which a short scene is performed showing a moment of oppression or discrimination. The spectators interject and become the actor taking a role and show how they would change the dialogue/script (ie face the oppression) and have a different (better) outcome.
Films	Trigger Films use brief (3–10 min) s movie clips to trigger debate, reflection, and help students to address issues such as ethical dilemmas.
Narratives	Patient narratives are commonly used as a trigger for discussions. Often, these highlight socio-economic, cultural or biographical aspects of a patient’s life and help to understand the impact of illness on his/her life.
Literature	Read and discuss fiction and nonfiction literature that informs patient perceptions, socio-cultural contexts, and clinical practice
Dance and movement	Students engage in dance and movement exercises and use it to express emotion and reduce stress.

e. Moving forward: Lessons from The Colombo Experience

In 1995, the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Colombo embarked on a significant curriculum reform, pioneering an integrated modular system with a longitudinal focus on Behavioural Sciences. This initiative, coordinated by the Behavioural Sciences Stream (BSS) — now known as the Humanities, Society, and Professionalism Stream (HSPS) — emphasized topics such as personal development, communication skills, medical ethics, health management, and professionalism.

Initially, artistic endeavours were largely limited to extracurricular activities, including concerts, art festivals, photography exhibitions, and musical events organized by students. However, in 2012, a pivotal shift occurred with the introduction of the first formal lecture on "Illness from the perspective of humanities." Subsequent curriculum workshops underscored the necessity of enhancing the educational input from humanities, supported by research indicating that the arts fostered compassion and empathy in students. Since 2015, we have had a handful of students opting to do an art related topic during their 4-week elective.

This momentum reached its pinnacle in August 2016 with the official establishment of the country's inaugural Department of Medical Humanities, a milestone in which I was honoured to serve as the founding Head. Expert-led lecture-discussions

were convened, exploring the role of humanities in healthcare, and this initiative reached its zenith with the First International Conference on Medical Humanities in 2018, themed "Learning to be more humane: The role of Medical Humanities." Notably, a half-day workshop on "Arts in Health Professional Education" was featured, enriching discussions on the intersection of art and health.

Insights gleaned from these activities, were used to design an innovative curriculum to promote humaneness and a person-centered approach to clinical practice. This curriculum incorporates a diverse range of educational strategies, including reflections on patient narratives, the critique of short stories, discussions on poetry, large-group lectures on the neurophysiology of compassion and empathy, and student seminars reflecting on observations of kind and unkind behaviours in hospitals.

Amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, the HSPS and the Department introduced an interactive series titled *Humanitas*. This initiative explores contemporary health-related issues, fostering transformative learning using the arts in an interactive manner. Notably, a recent *Humanitas* session focused on Rabindranath Tagore, accompanied by a four-day art exhibition showcasing Tagore's works and paintings celebrating his thoughts, life and work.

In conclusion, Dr. Nadarajah Sivarajah's legacy of compassion and kindness, forged during tumultuous times of armed

conflict, continues to resonate within the Faculty of Medicine. As we navigate towards the new era of Artificial Intelligence, we are presented with both challenges and opportunities. AI will increasingly play a pivotal role in healthcare, potentially replacing much of the technical expertise currently provided by health workers. However, the importance of humane values and human skills will only grow. Therefore, humanities will continue to play a vital role in nurturing compassion, empathy, and altruism.

As stewards of this legacy, the University of Jaffna is presented with a unique opportunity to innovate and pioneer a distinctive program through a dedicated Department of Humanities that celebrates the rich Tamil and Hindu culture of the region. Positioned as a beacon to the world, the you can redefine healthcare delivery with compassion at its core, perpetuating the light ignited by Dr. Nadarajah Sivarajah in our hearts.

Bibliography

1. Chisolm MS & Bhugra D. The arts and humanities are fundamental to health professions education, *International Review of Psychiatry*, February, 2024.
2. Howley L, Gauferberg E, King B. *The Fundamental Role of the Arts and Humanities in Medical Education*. Washington, DC: Association of American Medical Colleges 2020.
3. Jayasinghe, S., Integrating compassion to clinical care: a review of an emerging 'science'. *Ceylon Journal of Medical Science*, 2017;54(1):3-8.
4. Jayasinghe, S, de Abrew A, Amarasuriya, S, Fernando, S, Gunathilake, K Karunanayake, P, Rajasuriya, M. *A Primer for Undergraduate Courses in Medical Humanities and Professionalism*. Second Edition. 2023. Author publication
5. Sivarajah M. *Fourth Year Memorial Publication of Late Dr. Nadarajah Sivarajah*.. Kumanan Book House 2023.



Professor Saroj Jayasinghe

Emeritus Professor of Medicine, University of Colombo

Professor Saroj Jayasinghe, Emeritus Professor of Medicine, University of Colombo, qualified with MBBS (Hons) in 1979. He has three doctorates: MD in General Medicine from the University of Colombo, MD by research from the University of Bristol and a PhD from the Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo. He passed the MRCP (UK), and was awarded Fellowships by Royal College of Physicians (London), the Ceylon College of Physicians, the National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka, and the International Science Council.

He has played pioneering roles in medical education. These include introduction of Behavioural Sciences to the medical curriculum in 1995, founding the Department of Medical Humanities in 2016, organizing the first International Conference on Medical Humanities in July 2018, and the Colombo Medical Congress in 2020. He was the inaugural Professor Carlo Fonseka Orator and has delivered several guest lectures and workshops on Medical Humanities in Colombo, Malaysia, and Bhutan. Currently he is leading a regional initiative to introduce humanities to health professional education.

He introduced novel concepts to the academic discourse in Sri Lanka on topics such as economic evaluation of health in the 1990s and, in the early 2000s, topics on social determinants of health, mathematical modeling, and systems science. In the latter field he has published extensively on the role of complexity science in clinical medicine, clinical reasoning, and population health. More recently, his ideas aided the Faculty in launching the meditation research program and developing the rural health center at Kataragama.

He played a key role in the pioneering curriculum reforms in the Faculty of Medicine Colombo in 1990s, and served as the first director of MEDARC (the precursor of the Department of Medical Education), and has contributed to several developments in medical education: introduction of Behavioral Sciences, Problem-Based Learning, and Skills Laboratories to the medical curriculum.

Medical Humanities: He led the initiative that led to the establishment of the Department of Medical Humanities in 2016, the first of its kind in Sri Lanka and the region. In July 2018, he organized the first International Conference on Medical Humanities and the Colombo Medical Congress in 2020. He was the inaugural Professor Carlo Fonseka Orator in 2021 and has delivered several guest lectures, keynote addresses, and workshops on Medical Humanities locally and overseas. He has served as a member of the Advisory Board of the IMU's Centre for Bioethics and Humanities and as an advisor to develop the curriculum in Medical Humanities in the first medical school opened in Bhutan. He continues to lead the initiative in the WHO South-East Asia Region, which could position Sri Lanka as the hub for a global initiative to introduce humanities to health professional education. Currently, he is leading a regional initiative to introduce humanities to health professional education and coordinates the Global Network on Health Humanities.