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Editorial

Regional Medical Associations: Strengthening Professional Development, Research and Healthcare

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Healthcare systems depend on a skilled and committed workforce. Medical knowledge continues to expand, and health needs are also changing. Healthcare professionals must therefore continue to learn throughout their careers. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises health workforce development as essential for achieving universal health coverage and strengthening health systems [1]. Regional medical associations have an important role in this effort. These associations bring healthcare professionals together across specialities and institutions. They provide opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD), research and collaboration. They also help share new knowledge and improve clinical practice. International guidance emphasises the importance of lifelong learning that responds to professional and local healthcare needs [2,3]. These activities are particularly valuable for professionals working outside central health care and academic facilities.

In Sri Lanka, regional medical associations connect national professional colleges, universities, hospitals and healthcare teams. They bring academic activities closer to regional professionals. They also promote multidisciplinary learning and professional collaboration. Evidence from low- and middle-income countries highlights the importance of locally relevant and sustainable CPD programmes [4].

The Anuradhapura Medical Association (AMA) provides a good example of this approach. Since its establishment in December 2024, AMA has developed a wide range of academic and community activities based on the sustainable platform. In 2025, it conducted 12 regional academic meetings with national professional colleges, enabling the medical community in Anuradhapura to update knowledge and skills directly from national leaders. These programs featured tailored educational sessions for doctors, nurses, as well as other healthcare workers. Further, public awareness seminars and radio programmes educated the general public on timely health topics, while practical workshops, clinical grand rounds and postgraduate examination preparation sessions catered to the training of the next generation of medical practitioners. These activities have created learning opportunities for different healthcare professionals in the region. AMA has also promoted multidisciplinary learning. At its regional nephrology programme in 2025, more than 400 healthcare professionals participated. This included 190 nurses who received practical training in chronic ambulatory peritoneal dialysis and 210 doctors who attended clinical sessions [5]. Such programmes bring specialist knowledge closer to regional healthcare teams. They also encourage collaboration among different professional groups.

AMA activities have continued in 2026, with its theme of the year, "Science, Professionalism and Humanity towards Advancing Medical Practice". AMA's 2026

programme included fortnightly CME lectures covering a wide range of clinical topics, CPD workshops on improving communication, leadership and humane care [6]. The MD preparatory course was offered free of charge and opened to a wider audience online, extending beyond AMA's role as a regional medical organisation. These activities address both clinical and broader professional needs. The AMA expanded its reach to the general public in 2026 by conducting 32 live radio programmes reaching out to rural villages of Rajarata, educating the public on health topics of local importance. In line with the 2026 theme, AMA conducted its pre-congress program for the Annual Academic Sessions. A pre-congress lecture for nurses on delirium identification and management further demonstrates AMA's attention to the learning needs of different healthcare professionals [8]. The pre-congress workshop on 'Getting evidence into clinical practice' focused on using research evidence in clinical decisions [7]. AMA collaborated with the College of Anaesthesiologists and Intensivists of Sri Lanka to conduct a ventilation masterclass targeting the knowledge and skill development of medical practitioners in mechanical ventilation. Further, AMA organised a pre-congress hands-on workshop on Point-of-Care Ultrasound Scan (POCUS) to train doctors to use POCUS in emergency settings, led by top-level experienced trainers in the country. These skill development programs directly improve patient care in the region.

Research and scholarly communication are important parts of this work. Through research activities and the JoTH, AMA supports the sharing of local research and clinical experience. Regional journals are particularly important in tropical settings. They provide opportunities to publish research on local health problems and healthcare needs. Such evidence can help guide good clinical practice and effective patient and community care. Journals also help develop the research and writing skills of healthcare professionals.

The value of regional medical associations extends beyond the number of academic activities they conduct. Their contribution should also be reflected in improved professional knowledge, clinical practice and healthcare quality. This requires continued attention to research mentorship, quality improvement and the evaluation of educational activities. Collaboration with universities, hospitals, professional colleges and public health institutions will be important for future progress. The AMA's experience shows how a regional association can support professional development through education, research, and collaboration. Its activities also demonstrate the value of responding to local healthcare needs while contributing to wider professional and academic goals. Similar efforts are important across Sri Lanka and in other countries. Regional medical associations can help build stronger and more responsive healthcare systems.

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