

Obituary

The Legacy of late Professor Chandra Kumari Abeysekera: A lady like no other

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It is with unbearable grief and a profound sense of despair that we note the demise of Professor Chandra Kumari Abeysekera (nee Wysundera). She passed away peacefully on the 26th of October 2023, following a battle with an illness which she bore with tremendous composure and courage. An alluring light of exceptional brilliance has finally been extinguished.

Professor Abeysekera was the Emeritus Professor of Paediatrics in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya and an exceptional figure in the field of medicine and, more specifically, in the realm of Paediatric Nephrology. Her demise marks the end of an era and a great loss to the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Peradeniya and to the medical community as a whole. Throughout her illustrious career, she demonstrated a unique blend of academic brilliance, genuine warmth, and a deep commitment to her students and her field of expertise. The legacy she left behind is one of unwavering dedication and a lasting impact that continues to shape the world of paediatrics of Sri Lanka.

The lady was a shining example of academic excellence in the medical field. She began her journey in medicine at the University of Peradeniya and went on to earn many postgraduate accolades such as DCH, MD, MRCP, FRCP and FSLCPaed. Her early years in academia were marked by an insatiable thirst for knowledge and a drive to make meaningful contributions to the medical world. One of her most significant achievements was her

pioneering work in the field of Paediatric Nephrology. She dedicated her career to understanding and treating kidney diseases in children; a niche area that had been relatively underexplored. Through extensive research, she not only expanded our understanding of paediatric nephrology but also developed innovative treatment approaches that have improved the lives of countless children. Her compassionate care to her young patients, together with her dedication and expertise were a beacon of hope for her little patients and their parents. One of her most notable accomplishments was the establishment of the first dedicated Pediatric Nephrology unit in Sri Lanka, where she could focus on the unique needs of young patients with kidney diseases. This unit became a glittering hub for research, education, and treatment, leaving an enduring mark of excellence on the field. Emeritus Professor Chandra Kumari Abeysekera's dedication and contributions to pediatric nephrology were nothing short of extraordinary.

While Professor Abeysekera's academic contributions were undoubtedly impressive, what truly set her apart was her remarkable personality. She was loved by all who had the privilege of knowing her, both personally and professionally. Her warmth, compassion, and humility endeared her to students, colleagues, and patients alike. Her approach to teaching was not just about imparting knowledge but also about nurturing her students' growth. She was a mentor who encouraged critical thinking and instilled a passion for learning. Her

students fondly remember her as a guiding light, always ready to provide support and guidance. Professor Abeysekera had a unique ability to connect with her students and make complex medical concepts that much more accessible. Her teaching methods were not just about rote memorization but about understanding the underlying principles. Her lectures were known for their clarity and the enthusiasm with which she delivered them. Beyond the lecture halls, she actively engaged with her students and encouraged them to pursue their interests and passions. Many of her former students credit her for igniting their love for paediatric nephrology and inspiring them to follow in her footsteps. Her impact on the lives and careers of her students can never be overstated. Her kindness extended to her interactions with colleagues as well. She was known for her collaborative spirit and willingness to help others, creating a positive and nurturing academic environment. Her humility was another striking trait; she never sought the limelight for herself but rather focused on the betterment of the field and the well-being of her patients.

She took up Paediatric Nephrology as a special interest when that speciality was virtually *in utero*. She cradled that baby and saw it through its infancy and childhood. Today it is a full-blown speciality in its own right. That status was catalysed by pioneers such as Professor Chandra Abeysekera. She was a beacon in this field, shedding light on an area of medicine that had previously been in the shadows. Her pioneering research and clinical work not only improved the diagnosis and treatment of kidney diseases in children but also trained future Paediatric Nephrologists to provide yeoman service from then onwards. Professor Abeysekera's commitment to paediatric nephrology went beyond her professional life. She was a tireless advocate for raising awareness about kidney health in children. Her efforts led to greater emphasis on early detection and intervention, ensuring that young patients received the care they needed to lead healthier lives.

It has been said that there are hundreds of languages in the world but a smile speaks them all. Professor Abeysekera firmly believed that the best smile is the one that shines through good times as well as troubled ones. Her genuine smile could light up even a darkened room. Very often, it was the silver lining even in a cloud of desolation. The world of medicine lost a remarkable individual with the passing of Emeritus Professor Chandra Kumari Abeysekera. Her academic brilliance, unwavering dedication, and endearing personality left an indelible mark on the field of paediatrics and on the countless lives she touched. She will always be remembered as a beloved figure, a brilliant academic, and a compassionate healer. As we mourn her passing, we

also celebrate the incredible life she lived and the profound contributions she made to pediatric nephrology, forever bringing this vital field into the limelight.

Dear Chandra, having known you for over four decades, I am convinced that we will be faced with a different world without you. We would dearly miss you, as much as your husband Tilak and your immediate family would do. Their loss is our loss too.

Our most fervent wish is for you to rapidly attain the supreme bliss of Nibbana, following the shortest possible sojourn in samsara.

Dr B. J. C. Perera