

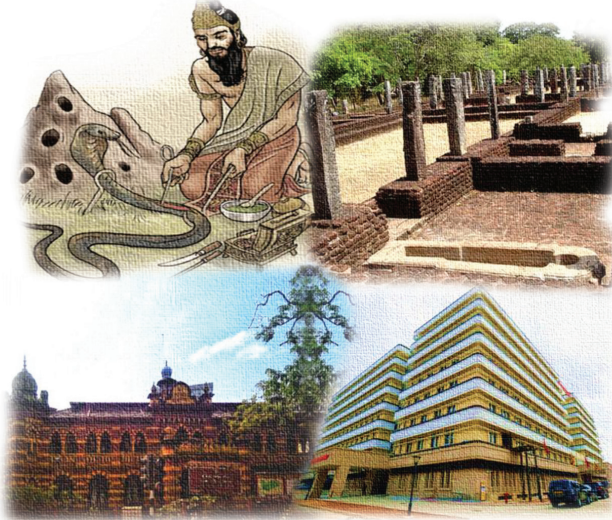
The legendary health system of Sri Lanka

PD Koggalage*

National Institute of Infectious Diseases, Sri Lanka

*Correspondence: dineshkoggalage@yahoo.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8037-9409>



Sri Lanka has a truly proud history of medicine which dates back over 2000 years according to the 'Mahavamsa' and ancient inscriptions. It was evident that several ancient rulers, including Kings Buddhadasa, Pandukabhaya and Maha Parakramabahu I, had practised medicine widely. Moreover, King Aggabodhi VII is known for his research in the field of medicine.

Amongst many important ancient milestones in this historical journey, the Hospital Complex in the Mihintale monastery is believed to be built by King Sena II, around 853 AD and is considered the oldest archeological evidence so far of a hospital of this nature in the whole world. Passing many important landmarks in this journey, the General Hospital, Colombo (now the National Hospital of Sri Lanka) was established during the administration of Sir Henry Ward (1855-1860). At present, the National Hospital of Sri Lanka has become the premier Teaching Hospital and the apex referral centre in the country. A major advance in the field of public health was the establishment of the system of Health Units with a Medical Officer of Health (MOH) as the Head of each Health Unit. The original Health Unit, the first of such a nature in Asia, was established in

Kalutara in 1926. This Health Unit system has undoubtedly pioneered the preventive health sector which has accomplished commendable health outcomes during the past few decades.

With incremental changes over the years, Sri Lanka comprised a network of curative and preventive health facilities when it gained independence in 1948. At present, the health system is predominantly Allopathic (Western), but still pluralistic with other alternative health care delivery methods, such as Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Homeopathy. Moreover, the 'traditional medical system' usually passed down from generation to generation has been playing an important role in health care. Today, this exemplary health system, with its dedicated workforce, has become resilient to diverse challenges, including pandemics and chronic non-communicable diseases with an ageing population. Even with the current economic crisis, this strongly founded health system stands steadily to serve the people of Sri Lanka. In this backdrop, the system is being further strengthened with evidence-based practice through research to further uplift the well-being of the nation.