



Monash University trains senior Sri Lankan community health professionals. In 2011, six Sri Lankan medical practitioners trained in their specialist fields at the Monash University School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine (SPHPM) in Melbourne, Australia. The 12-month placements are designed to broaden public health training in the practitioners' specialist fields to prepare them for senior roles in the Sri Lankan community health system.

The Sri Lankan Ministry of Health sponsors the

advice and mentoring to the practitioners. Dr Douglas says "There are sufficient cultural similarities to allow our Sri Lankan colleagues an easy transition and adaptation to the Australian environment. They are exposed to a broad range of Public Health research and practice. To date we have provided 16 placements and we keep in regular contact with our alumni as they progress into senior roles."

Dr Jayamini Illesinghe, the Research Manager in SPHPM, of Monash University, will soon be visiting alumni in Sri Lanka to see how former partic-

Dr Shahim says that the academic courses in SPHPM helped to update her knowledge and skills in areas such as data management, statistical analysis and health management. The visits to Maternal and Child Health community centres in Australia were particularly useful. "The visit to the Apollo Bay Dental Clinic was a real highlight in my training, as the work carried out there is very similar to what we strive to achieve in Sri Lanka," she said.

Dr Shahim is passionate about preventing dental caries in young children. Upon her return to

identify strategies suitable for Sri Lanka.

Dr Jayalath performed the first community-based cross-sectional survey in Sri Lanka on knee Osteoarthritis (OA). Her doctoral research assessed the prevalence and modifiable risk factors of knee OA in adults over 50 years of age. Dr Jayalath is currently in the Musculoskeletal Unit in SPHPM, studying attitudes towards weight loss in people with OA. Her study involves working closely with radiologists to measure meniscal tears in knee MRIs. Dr Eeshara Kottegododa Vithana is a medical

## Rivals on the cricket pitch, team-mates in public health



ipants are making a difference to public health. Many of the former practitioners are making outstanding contributions.

Dr Nazria Shahim is a community dentist who is a past participant in the program. She completed her



community health program for mid-career Sri Lankan medical and dental practitioners. The participants are highly accomplished graduates with a strong potential for leadership in teaching and public health practice. Each practitioner spends a year in an overseas centre of excellence in public health research to be accredited as a Community Health Practitioner. After returning to Sri Lanka, most have moved into key public health and administrative roles throughout the country.

SPHPM, of Monash University developed the program to meet the needs of the Sri Lankan Ministry of Health to improve public health in Sri Lanka. The program, which has been running for 10 years, is coordinated by Dr Elizabeth Douglas, who arranges introductions to government and non-government public health organizations in Melbourne along with supportive

training in SPHPM in 2006. When she returned to Sri Lanka she took up a position as a consultant in Community Dentistry in the Department of Dental Public Health in the Dental Institute in Maharagama.

In SPHPM, Dr Shahim carried out her placement in the Trauma Unit. She decided to train at Monash University because SPHPM has an excellent reputation in health management.

Sri Lanka she established a preventive clinic for children and pregnant mothers that screens for oral health problems. In addition, Dr Shahim's team implemented outreach and mobile dental programs and oral health awareness programs among preschool children, preschool teachers, school children, parents, factory workers, children in institutions and orphanages and rehabilitation homes. She was a leader in obtaining funding from the government and NGOs to establish these programs.

Dr Pushpika Jayalath and Dr Eeshara Kottegododa Vithana are two of the six participants of the program of SPHPM in 2011.



Dr Pushpika Jayalath is a medical practitioner with an interest in the ageing population, which has become a serious problem in Sri Lanka. "The rate of ageing has now reached the maximum of a devel-

oped country: 12 - 15% of people are aged 60 years or more."

As Sri Lanka lacks strong policies to cope with an ageing population, Dr Jayalath is studying the aged care programs in Australia to help

practitioner training at the Victorian Institute for Forensic Medicine (VIFM) in SPHPM. His training at VIFM is a natural extension of his work in Sri Lanka in disaster management and injury prevention.

He was a leader of the health sector rehabilitation program that commenced after the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004. In 2008, he was appointed the coordinator of the newly established Disaster Preparedness and Response Unit within the Ministry of Health. This unit served as the main coordination hub in health care provision to 300,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka in 2009. He was also instrumental in setting up National Injury Surveillance in Sri Lanka.

Dr Vithana said that VIFM was his obvious choice to carry out his research, as he had already started collecting data from mortuaries in Sri Lanka for his study. His work is on injury surveillance using mortuary data. This is the first ever study of this nature in a developing country and he is in the process of writing up the results of his pilot of a WHO-Monash guideline on mortuary based injury surveillance.

Dr Vithana is also analysing mortality data of IDPs in Sri Lanka. He is in the process of preparing further articles for peer-reviewed jour-

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