



# Sri Lanka Association for Child Development Newsletter

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## ‘Autism Awareness Day’ campaign on 02 April 2017

Autistic Spectrum Disorder, a pervasive developmental disorder is recognized as the fastest growing developmental disability in the world. It is a condition that requires early detection and early intervention in order to achieve the best outcome, with significant support from multiple stake holders.

On Sunday, 2nd of April, 2017, the Sri Lanka Association for Child Development (SLACD) will hold its annual Autism Day Celebrations at Viharamahadevi Park, Colombo from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

SLACD has organized a program including a walk to promote public awareness about Autism Spectrum Disorder. Sensory games, fun events, relaxation and yoga sessions have been arranged for the children with Autism and their families. SLACD is expecting about thousand participants for the program including children with autism, their parents, volunteers, professionals and others supporting the worthy cause.



## President's Message

It is a special privilege to begin my term as president of the Sri Lanka Association for Child Development, an association dedicated to support the healthy development of all children within the country. Children are the most precious resource and supporting them to reach their full potential is the responsibility of all individuals. I'm therefore, honored to be the president of the SLACD and eager to work towards developing the facilities available for the children of our country.



The SLACD, the first multidisciplinary association in Sri Lanka was founded by Prof. Hemamali Perera who valued the knowledge and skills of all professionals working in the area of child development. The association now consists of pediatricians, child and adult psychiatrists, neurologists, physiotherapist, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and psychologists. Through inter sector and intra sector collaboration, the association has conducted many programs that have benefited the development of children. I would like to thank Dr. Samanmali Sumansena, the outgoing president of the SLACD for successfully guiding the association from the year 2014 to 2016.

The association will be conducting a program for the Lady Ridgeway Hospital staff to celebrate World Downs Syndrome Day, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, 2017. Pediatricians and parents of children with Downs Syndrome will address the gathering on the day. An Autism Awareness Day will be conducted on Sunday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April at Viharamahadevi Park, Colombo. The program will consist of an awareness walk and activities for the children with autism and their parents. In addition, an outreach program for Autism and other developmental disorders will be conducted in collaboration with Citizens Development Bank and the Ministry of Health. We plan to begin the program in the Kalutara District.

A play therapy intervention program will be conducted later in the year to address the importance of play for all children. A group of pediatricians belonging to the association in collaboration with Sri Lanka College of Pediatricians will be conducting a program for neonatal developmental care and early intervention. An employer's forum will also be organized to empower and train children with disabilities to join the work force. Furthermore, special sub committees were formed to liaise with Education, Legal and Social Services Departments with regards to their policies related to the children of Sri Lanka.

I look forward to working along with the dedicated council members of SLACD to promote awareness of child development and childhood disabilities within Sri Lanka. I would also like to thank all our members of the SLACD for their continued support towards the programs organized by the association.

## Leading Article

by Dr Udena Attygalle, Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist, Teaching Hospital Karapitiya.

### **The MMR vaccine and Autism; a recent, large study finds no link.**

Almost 19 years ago in 1998, Andrew Wakefield and 12 others published a case series in the prestigious *Lancet* medical journal which suggested that the MMR or Measles, mumps and rubella vaccine may predispose to developmental disorders in children. However, the authors also stated that 'We did not prove an association between measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine and the syndrome described'.

Although this was a case series of only 12 subjects, the study received wide publicity and the rates of MMR vaccination was seen to drop markedly. Parents who were naturally concerned opted not to have the vaccine. This led to several epidemics of the diseases the MMR vaccine protected against, with disastrous consequences.

The logic of the suggested link was however, questioned as both the overt manifestations of Autism and vaccination with MMR occur around the same time. Epidemiological studies with larger samples have repeatedly found no link with autism and the MMR vaccination. Sometime later in 2004, ten of the Wakefield study's authors issued a statement which stated: "We wish to make it clear that in this paper no causal link was established between MMR vaccine and autism as the data were insufficient. Then in 2011 the *Lancet* completely retracted the article, due to several faults in the article, a rare occurrence for the *Lancet*.

Meanwhile a large study involving over 95000 children in 2015 by Anjali Jain et al, in the prestigious *Journal of the American Medical association (JAMA)* was consistent in its finding with the previous epidemiological studies. They found no evidence that receipt of either 1 or 2 doses of MMR vaccination was associated with an increased risk of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) among children who had older siblings with ASD. However, they observed that children who have siblings diagnosed with ASD, tended to be under-vaccinated. This highlighted the possible concerns of parents.

It was also seen that around 7 percent of children with an older sibling with autism developed the disorder. This too was fairly consistent with other studies. This study however used data from a private insurance claims database, and had some limitations.

Finally, while the saga of autism and vaccination may have reached a conclusion for now, researchers are currently looking for a role for immune system dysfunction in autism. They are looking at interactions between the developing neural and immune systems. Nonetheless, it is probable that we may not see practical applications from these studies for many years to come.



## World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD) - 21 March 2017

United Nations has observed 21<sup>st</sup> March annually as WDSD since 2012, while many countries have marked this day from 2006. The main purpose of this has been to increase awareness about Down syndrome, what it means to the individuals and their families to have this condition, what abilities and therefore what contributions such persons make in our society.

This year SLACD will be celebrating this day with a workshop for health care workers at Lady Ridgeway Hospital for Children (LRH) in the old auditorium from 8 am to 12 noon.

We invite you to join us in lifting one voice for children with Down Syndrome to have equal rights, opportunities and inclusion in society as others.

## Highlights of Autism Awareness Media Campaign - Press conference 2016



## Highlights of the SLACD Conference 2017

