

**Message from the Chairperson, PeMURS'26 | Head, Department of Community Medicine | Coordinator, Student Research Projects**

It is with profound pride and immense pleasure that I welcome you all to the inaugural Peradeniya Medical Undergraduate Research Symposium – PeMURS'26, organised by the Department of Community Medicine.

This symposium represents the grand culmination of the research journey of our 2020/21 batch of medical students, which began in August 2023. As the Coordinator of the Student Research Projects for almost a decade, I have had the distinct privilege of watching our medical undergraduates evolve over the years. From formulating their very first research questions to navigating the labyrinth of data analysis, ethical clearances, late-night report writing, and facing the *viva voce* examination, they have shown remarkable resilience. Today, that hard work transforms into a platform of intellectual exchange, making them no longer just consumers of medical knowledge, but also creators of it.

As the Head of the Department of Community Medicine, I am particularly heartened to see the diverse scope of the studies presented. True medical advancement cannot exist in a vacuum; it must translate to the wellbeing of the community at large. Many of the projects featured in PeMURS'26 look beyond clinical charts to explore the wider determinants of health. I extend my deepest gratitude to the academic staff members of the Department of Community Medicine, fellow faculty members, supervisors, and examiners who have selflessly invested their time and expertise to guide these young minds.

We are deeply privileged to welcome two illustrious alumni of our faculty who have made monumental contributions to Community Medicine and research education in Sri Lanka for this inaugural symposium. We are honoured to have as our Chief Guest, Dr. D.B. Nugegoda, Retired Professor of Community Medicine at the University of Peradeniya, whose pioneering legacy and decades of dedication continue to shape and guide our department's vision. Joining him is our Keynote Speaker, Prof. Nuwan Wickramasinghe, a globally recognised researcher and the Chair Professor of Community Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. Having these distinguished alumni return to inspire the next generation of medical researchers is a beautiful, profound testament to the enduring academic lineage of Peradeniya.

As the Chairperson of PeMURS'26, I must acknowledge that an event of this magnitude is never a solo endeavour. My sincere thanks go to the Dean, the abstract reviewers, and the judges for their invaluable contributions. I am exceptionally proud of our organising committee, which brings together student representatives from all medical batches currently registered in the faculty. By working hand-in-hand alongside our academic and non-academic staff members to plan this event, these students have gained the complete, multi-faceted experience of putting together a professional research symposium from the ground up. I thank them deeply for their tireless efforts.

To our student presenters: this is your stage to showcase your research projects. Approach today as a celebration of your scientific curiosity and hard work. Let this be the launching pad for your future careers as clinician-scientists who do not just accept the status quo, but constantly ask, "Why?" and "How can we make it better?"

I wish you all an inspiring, intellectually stimulating, and successful symposium.

Prof. Samidi Navaratna

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*Chairperson, PeMURS'26*

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