

Editorial

In the past eighteen months, the world's attention has been on COVID-19 and we, in Sri Lanka have experienced the devastating effects of this pandemic on health and economic viability of our population. 'Normal' life as we know it has been disrupted with consequences in all areas of our lives. However, there are a few (often unnoticed) silver linings, one of which directly impacts on the diagnosis and prevention of infectious diseases.

SLJID Editorials in 2020^{1,2} brought out 4 key areas which needed our attention

Firstly, the need for investment in diagnostic microbiology services and evaluation of tests used for diagnostic purposes based on 'evidence based laboratory medicine'. There are many challenges, ranging from space, training needs, timely communication of results and action based on results, to name a few. As the case reports in this issue of the Journal demonstrates, microbiologists and clinicians have responded to these challenges and reported positive patient outcomes. We need to continue to use the 'window' provided by the pandemic to further improve diagnostic services throughout the country to maximize benefit to both clinicians and their patients.

Secondly, the need for identifying tests useful for screening in addition to those useful for diagnosis for infectious diseases prevalent in Sri Lanka. Updating of laboratory methods to provide the most reliable and useful information for clinical and public health use remains a priority. Systems for continuing evaluation of newly introduced tests, both for their accuracy as well as value in improving patient and public health outcomes require to be implemented to obtain maximum benefit from improving laboratory services.

A third 'silver lining' is in the highlighting of infection control practices within all healthcare systems in the country. The provision of improved facilities for handwashing, and recognition of transmission of commonly encountered pathogens in healthcare facilities have allowed infection control practices to be strengthened. It is now a priority to maintain and improve these activities to reduce the burden on healthcare associated infections throughout our healthcare systems in Sri Lanka.

Sustainability of all the above mentioned measures is essential to consolidate the improvements and requires the combined efforts of all stakeholders

Last and certainly in no way the least, the pandemic has demonstrated the powerful effects of modern social media – 'the "infodemic" of false interpretations, mis-representations and emergence of pseudo-science over science with emotion rather than evidence a dominant factor in both individual as well as collective decision making'¹. This is by no means restricted to Sri Lanka and is of concern worldwide. Contributions to this issue demonstrate the problems raised by using social media and news sources for information on COVID-19 by medical students and misinformation on antibiotics by the general public. We need to urgently study the 'art and science' of effective communication together with public health and communication professionals to understand the reasons for the "infodemic" and develop strategies to overcome them in the future.

We hope that you will continue to find the contents of this issue useful and thought provoking. We welcome contributions to the Journal (<https://sljid.sljol.info/>).

Vasanthi Thevanesam

Editor – Sri Lankan Journal of Infectious Diseases

¹ Editorial - COVID-19 as an opportunity doi: <http://doi.org/10.4038/sljid.v10i1.8294>

² Editorial - doi: <http://doi.org/10.4038/sljid.v10i2.8326>