

Editorial – Moving on: Towards an eHealth Master Plan for Sri Lanka

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Information and communication technology is not alien to Sri Lanka. In fact when the revolution in personal computers was unfolding in the early 1980s, there were many Sri Lankans who were fortunate enough to own one. The 8-bit personal home computer - ZX Spectrum from Sinclair Research Ltd, UK, with 48kb of memory! (a picture of which is on this page) - was the very first one that I was privileged to own as an ordinary level student in 1984 – the reward for coming first in class.

In the 1990s, the telecommunications and banking sectors in Sri Lanka embraced the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution in a big way and started doing their business electronically. We, in the health sector, watched by passively as other sectors also took the same route. The health sector in our country, although boasting of health indicators that match the West, have been slow to embrace ICT and we still continue to carry out the ‘business’ of health using paper based archaic systems. The disadvantages of such systems, the very justification for embracing ICT, are amply illustrated throughout the pages of every issue of this journal.

This issue of the Journal carries a situation analysis of the country’s health information system⁽¹⁾ that should serve to open the eyes of all those concerned and make them take stock of the situation and plan to take immediate corrective action. It is no secret that the introduction of ICT into the health sector in the country has already begun. It is however happening in a haphazard manner with no proper plan to ensure its sustainability in terms of manpower, infrastructure, and finances.

The time has come therefore to develop an eHealth master plan for Sri Lanka. Such a plan would help direct our energies towards working to achieve a common goal. It is my wish that the key stakeholders in this process, the Ministry of Health, the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine, the Health Informatics Society of Sri Lanka and the Information and Communication Technology Authority of Sri Lanka can come together to make an eHealth master plan for Sri Lanka a reality.

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