

## **e-Health Sri Lanka 2010**

**Dr. Saminda M. Dharmaratne** MBBS, DCH

Chairperson

Organising Committee

eHealth Sri Lanka 2010

E-mail : samindamadhu.lk@gmail.com

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Since the inception of the Health Informatics Society of Sri Lanka (HISSL) in 1998, one of the major dreams has been to enable the health care system to function more effectively with the added contributions made by Information and Communication Technology. In September 2010, in accordance with the vision of the government on Health Care Information Technology, HISSL laid the foundation for a new era in IT enabled health care in Sri Lanka by successfully conducting eHealth Sri Lanka 2010 with the participation of all stakeholders in health care in Sri Lanka.

Under the guidance of the current president of HISSL, Dr. Vajira H.W. Dissanayake, a two-day international conference was held in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA), and the Post Graduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM) of the University of Colombo at Waters Edge on September 15 and 16, 2010. The event was graced by the presence of the Minister of Health, Honourable Maithripala Sirisena MP as the Chief Guest and Minister of Technology and Research Honourable Professor Tissa Vitharana MP as the Guest of Honour.

The main objective of the conferences was to provide a common platform for all those carrying out various IT based projects in the health care sector of Sri Lanka to present their work and exchange ideas. An interesting two day program was held under the theme “IT enabled Health Care”. The programme included plenary lectures, symposia and oral as well as poster presentations under 7 main themes.

1. e-Health Policy
2. IT for Health Administration
3. eHealth in Private Sector
4. Clinical informatics
5. Public health informatics
6. IT for Medical Education
7. Special Topics

All symposia were chaired by an experienced panel of experts from the Ministry of Health, PGIM, ICTA and University of Colombo School of Computing (UCSC). Dr. Wimal Jayantha, Deputy Director General (Planning), Ministry of Health; Prof Rezvi Sheriff, Director PGIM; Professor Lalitha Mendis, Chairperson, Sri Lanka Medical Council; Dr. (Ms) Shiromi Arunathilake, Senior Lecturer, UCSC and Mr. Sanjaya Karunasena Chief Technical Officer, ICTA were among them.

As expected, eHealth Sri Lanka 2010, with a large gathering exceeding 300 on each day, provided the ideal forum to share information and results of research in various aspects of eHealth.

The conference was addressed by a panel of vastly experienced local and foreign speakers. Some of the key speakers were:

- Mr. Reshan Devapura, Chief Operating Officer, ICTA (eHealth Policy),
- Prof. Artur W. Dubrawski, Director, Auton Lab, Carnegie Mellon University, USA (Clinical Informatics),
- Prof. Sundeep Sahay, Professor, Department of Informatics, University of Oslo, Norway (Public Health Informatics)
- Prof. Erle Lim Chuen Hian, Associate Professor. National University Health System, National University of Singapore. (IT for Medical Education)
- Dr. Molly Cheah, President, Open Source Health Care Alliance.

It was a rare treat to listen to over 20 informative lectures delivered by renowned invited speakers during the two days program. About a third of these were by foreign delegates which made the event a truly international one.

The submissions for the free papers were more than we expected. The best 7 out of more than 60 submissions were selected as oral presentations. Majority of the rest were selected as Poster presentations and were displayed at the venue. Initiation of preparation of an e-Health Policy for Sri Lanka, going in parallel with the e-Government policy, was perhaps the most significant success achieved through e-Health Sri Lanka 2010.

The participants heard about the existing Health IT systems in Sri Lanka as well as in other parts of the world. In addition they heard many novel ideas which may be applicable for the Sri Lankan Health Care System. It was perhaps not too optimistic to visualise the days in the future in which a Sri Lankan doctor, patient or a normal citizen would be using IT when seeking health care through a Government Hospital. With the development of necessary infrastructure and human resources, the Ministry of Health was trying to change gears to usher in a new era for the Sri Lankan Health Care System. PGIM was in the process of facilitating the process by producing doctors who are competent in IT.

Dialog, Intel and GE Health Care were the main sponsors of eHealth Sri Lanka 2010. The Sri Lanka Rupavahini Cooperation supported it as the Electronic Media Partner. The Print Media Partners were the Sunday Observer and the Daily News.

We were happy to see that dreams of those who founded HISSL a decade ago were slowly becoming a reality today. The contribution made by eHealth Sri Lanka 2010 to accelerate that process was not lost on those who participated in the conference. eHealth Sri Lanka 2010 was definitely a turning point in the history of the Sri Lankan Health Care System.