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AFLAS FOCUS

History and development of laboratory animal science in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo (UCFM), is the forerunner in the laboratory animal science (LAS) field in Sri Lanka. Here laboratory animals such as rats, frogs and rabbits were used in medical education to demonstrate physiological principles in the early 1950s. The establishment of the first animal house in 1969 at UCFM better facilitated the use of laboratory animals in medical education and research. By 2006, lack of ethical guide lines was an issue and a set of ethical guidelines was developed and published in 2009, which today are followed by researchers and reviewers in many universities and research institutions in the country. With this development, there was a need for an organized system of education for the LAS discipline. This was fulfilled by conducting the first certificate course on LAS in the Asian region in 2011 in collaboration with the Utrecht University, Netherlands. The Sri Lanka Association for LAS has continued LAS education since its establishment in 2012 at UCFM by conducting workshops and short courses.

KEYWORDS
history, laboratory animal science, LAS education, SLALAS, Sri Lanka, UCFM

1 | INTRODUCTION

Being a Buddhist country in the Asian region, rulers and the people have since ancient times been very kind to animals. Hospitals were established and physicians allocated specifically for treating animals in ancient Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) by King Buddhadasa (AD 340-368), who was a physician by himself. Down the line, King Pandukabahaya (4th century BC) and King Parakramabahu I (AD 1153-1186) also encouraged treatment of animals during their respective reigns.[1] However, with developments in the country over time, concern for animal welfare and the humane treatment of animals did not prevent the use of animals for the advancement of knowledge in science and medicine. The history of laboratory animal use in medical education in Sri Lanka dates back to the 1950s according to archived information (tracings of frog and rabbit cardiac muscle action potentials and changes in the presence of different ions, etc. by the physiologist Dr H. D. W. Jansz in 1951 and 1952) in the Department of Physiology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo (UCFM), although there is no evidence to support the presence of a separate animal facility/house at that time at UCFM, which is the second oldest medical school in Australasia, established as the "Ceylon Medical School" in 1870.[2] Available records show that the first animal house in the country for teaching and experimental purposes was established at UCFM in 1969.

2 | ROLE OF LAB ANIMALS IN MEDICAL EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

From the inception of the animal house until 1987, there was a special concern to demonstrate physiological concepts using hearts of amphibians, rats and rabbits, to medical students of UCFM. These

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