

Why Traditions Matter!

We celebrate yet another New Year in Sri Lanka. Why do we have a new year in April? One not accustomed to Sri Lankan ways may ask!

Activities related to the celebration of the traditional New Year are based on auspicious times given by the astrologers. According to astrology, New Year begins when the sun moves from Meena Rashiya (the house of Pisces) to Mesha Rashiya (the house of Aries). The New Year celebration, therefore, is a complex mix of indigenous, astrological, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions.

Historically, it also marks the end of the harvest season. For farming communities, the traditional new year is a festival of harvest.

Celebrated year after year for more than two thousand years, it is an established tradition in Sri Lanka. A **tradition**, as documented by Wikipedia, is a system of beliefs or behaviors passed down within a group of people or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past.

Sociologically, it can be argued that, tradition-oriented societies have been characterized as valuing filial piety, harmony and group welfare, stability, and interdependence.

The core of the traditional New Year therefore is about fostering the virtue of love and respect for each other with particular emphasis on parents and elders. It is about community celebration of life with family and friends. A gathering together at least once a year to show our devotion to our loved ones, while passing on the traditions to our children of valuing our relationships. It is celebrated in song, dance, beating of drums, sharing sweetmeats, engaging in community gatherings and games and attending religious activities.

The socializing involved no doubt is therapy for the mind. It improves our mental well-being and facilitates the renewal of neuronal connections in the brain. It is these activities that keep our brain cells ticking. Time and time again, scientific research reiterates that social isolation is a risk factor for dementia. So unknowingly, the traditions keep us socially engaged and connected; food for our brain enabling it to delay the onset of dementia!

We wish you all a happy and meaningful traditional New Year !

Prof. Shehan Williams

President

Happy Sinhala & Tamil New Year to our readers!

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Free Memory Screening

2024

April - 5th – 19th
 May - 3rd – 17th
 June - 7th – 28th

Appointments are limited.

**Please call the Helpline 2667080
to register.**

Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation

Website: www.alzlanka.org

Email: alzheimers@alzlanka.org



Scrabble Bash 2024

The Annual “Scrabble Bash” was successfully concluded on Saturday 2nd March 2024. The winner, together with the runner-up and other winners, walked away with some exciting prizes donated by Hilton Colombo, Shangri-La, Hilton Colombo Residence, Hotel Taj Samudra, Galadari Hotel, Cinnamon Grand and Cinnamon Lakeside.

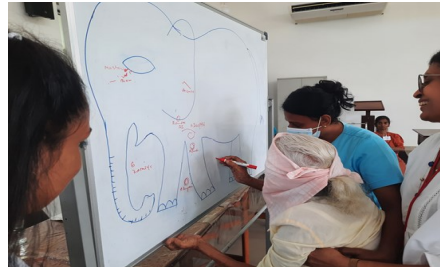
Scrabble Bash brought together people of all ages. LAF promotes this event as Scrabble is one of the games that stimulate brain activity as it requires players to come up with new words. The winner of Category A was Indunil Amarasinghe and the Runner-Up was Sachiv Prasath of Lyceum International School, Wattala.

Our sincere appreciation and a big thank you to the team, with Shaila Amalean at the helm, who has continuously organized this event over the years, and for the numerous sponsors for their continuous support.



LAF Avurudhu Celebrations

LAF celebrated the Sinhala and Tamil New Year with clients in the Activity Centre. Many clients came dressed in this year’s auspicious colour of blue, as did the volunteers, adding a splash of colour to the festivities. Clients enjoyed taking part in Avurudu games organized by the volunteers. After the games, they had a session of dancing followed by a traditional meal of kiribath and avurudu sweetmeats. The afternoon session saw a round of drumming and singing with almost all joining in the fun.



CALL OUR HELP LINES - 2667080 / 2667982 / 2667084

Mobile No: 076 082 7080

Monday to Friday | 9am– 5pm

For information on dementia and dementia care management

Colombo District Dementia Awareness Programmes

Lanka Alzheimer's foundation conducted awareness programmes for the community in Maligakanda and Maligawatta East in collaboration with the Colombo District Secretariat, Elderly Care Promotional Unit. The LAF presentation focused on increasing the awareness about dementia, promoting services given by Lanka Alzheimer's foundation, giving understanding about early detection of dementia and practices for preventing dementia within the community. In addition, they discussed how to manage risk factors of the community and to promote healthy lifestyle behaviors for dementia.



Maligakanda villagers



Panchikawatte villagers

From a Student Volunteer's Perspective

What is dementia? What is this disease all so common, which has been plaguing my grandmother for as long as I can remember? I wanted answers. I wanted to know more, to know that my grandmother is not the only one. That's how it started. And so I found this house of glass. I wanted a quick look, a short stay to satiate my curiosity, but my oh my, did I fall in love with this little haven. I was here for three months. The smiles on my clients' faces, their smiles gave me such joy. Their stories all so interesting, laced with a little bit of whimsy and old people humor. I wonder how much was truth, and how much was creative freedom they exercised. I got a lot of answers to my questions, along with a lot more questions. The human brain is such a fascinating place.

My fellow volunteers taught me so much. These women, how lucky I am to have met them. They guided me, taught me, and encouraged me. Their enthusiasm to help not only me but also every single person who walked through those gates, amazed me. It inspired me. All these volunteers operated with such kindness and love. And I cannot forget the food! I was always sneaking in second servings, the kitchen maids always ready to bat me for leaving leftovers sometimes. These people, with such love...the human heart is such a fascinating place.

My 50 hours went quite fast, but that wasn't enough for me. The singing, the dancing, and I can't forget all the fun crafts we did. Truly no two days were the same, and I loved it. I never knew what the next week would hold.

The best part was of course the clients. Their singing, dancing, some tapping along to the music, but everyone always smiling, genuinely having a good time. They were all so forthcoming about their mischievous childhood, their adventures around the world, their children.

These memories and the experience I gained, truly there is no substitute. I'm grateful for this opportunity. I'll fondly carry these memories in my heart. Thank you for a very valuable summer



-Sanduni Nishara Dahanayake-

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest complement, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around” - Leo Buscaglia-

Be mindful of dementia and take steps now

By Prof. Shehan Williams

We can all expect to live longer than ever before. Despite all the sickness and calamity around us, the world certainly affords a better quality of life to the average person.

As humans we are perhaps at a zenith in our existence on earth with science giving us many comforts and experiences, we can dare say were never imagined by persons living a millennium or even a century ago. This may even be the golden era considering the predictions on climate change and its impact on health in the years to come.

Modern medicine has played a significant role in contributing to our longevity.

The heart that works non-stop from birth to death and usually the

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first to give up, is now supported with hitherto unconjured interventions that extend its lifespan.

Infections, another cause of early death, are now defeated with a range of precision weapons that can destroy the deadliest viruses and bacteria that struck terror in the minds of humankind a few years ago. So are the many organs in the body which have been given a new lease of life through advanced diagnostic and treatment strategies.

Unfortunately, the final frontier that medicine is still struggling to dominate is the brain. Until we can come up with a mechanism to rebuild or restore the wear and tear in the brain over time, our greatest challenge will be to maintain our brain health.

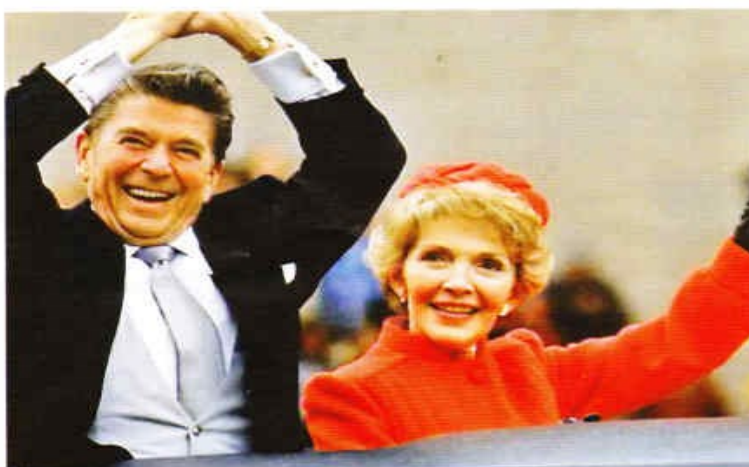
As the brain ages, dementia will become one of the biggest public health concerns of our time. It is a disease that sets in unexpectedly, and robs us of our memory and ability to think and act.

Dementia, comes in many forms. Alzheimer's is the commonest cause followed by Vascular dementia and Parkinson's related dementia. There are other rarer forms, some of which may be treatable. There is still no conclusive cure for the former three.

The following is from a letter written by a former acclaimed President of the United States of America, Ronald Reagan.

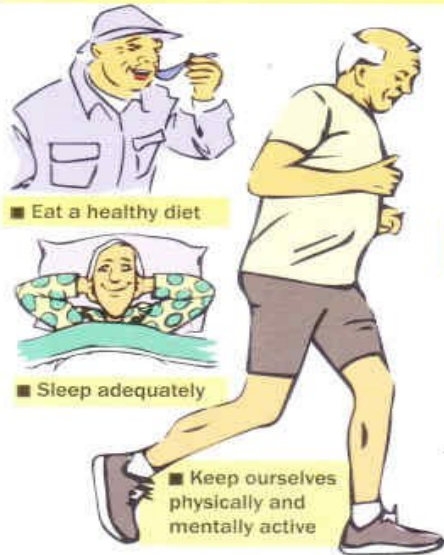
"I have recently been told that I am one of the millions of Americans who will be afflicted with Alzheimer's Disease. At the moment I feel just fine. Unfortunately, as Alzheimer's Disease progresses, the family often bears a heavy burden.

"I only wish there was some way I could spare Nancy from this painful experience. When the time comes I am confident that with your help she will face it with faith and courage. In closing, let me thank you, the American



Former American President Ronald Reagan and wife Nancy

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT DEMENTIA



■ Eat a healthy diet

■ Sleep adequately

■ Keep ourselves physically and mentally active



■ Control blood pressure, cholesterol and sugar levels



■ Avoid harmful habits such as smoking and alcohol

- We need to make sure that the blood supply to the brain is not compromised by ensuring optimal blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels.

These steps are of paramount importance to all Sri Lankans. As a nation we are going to struggle for years to come, to provide optimal health and social care to our ageing population due to the financial setbacks in the country.

As per current population trends, in around 10 years every 5th person in Sri Lanka will be over the age of 60 years. We are the fastest ageing population in South Asia. In essence, as a country we will be old before we are rich!

With young people migrating, the issues will be further compounded. Smaller family sizes, and with children abroad, most older persons will have to fend for themselves. Loneliness and social isolation will be a stark reality for many in their old age unless we engineer social interventions to cushion the impact.

people, for giving me the great honor of allowing me to serve as your President."

The above captures the **key emotions** of the condition;

- The acceptance of the inevitable.
- The determination to live with dignity and battle the disease.
- The acknowledgement of the demand on the family caregivers.
- The assurance of a life well lived in the service of friends, family and the larger community.

We need to brace ourselves to face this condition as we age. It is going to affect many of us, if not others near and dear to us. If so, the fight against dementia starts now.

It is never too early to inform ourselves of the condition and start living a health-conscious life that will at least delay the onset of dementia.

What then are the measures we can adopt?

- Keep ourselves physically and mentally active.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Sleep adequately.
- Avoid harmful habits such as smoking and alcohol.



The Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation

HEALTH

LAF has a model centre but Sri Lanka needs a Dementia Action Plan

The Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation (LAF) was incorporated in 2001 to address the very issues dementia would wreak.

We are glad that we have raised much needed awareness on this issue and have a model resource and activity centre in Maradana, opened in 2011 through the dedicated efforts of Lorraine Yu.

We nevertheless have a long road ahead. Sri Lanka is yet to develop a comprehensive Dementia Action Plan. The plan will have to embrace a multi-sectoral approach with public, private and community participation. Unique and innovative actions, taking in to account resource limitations but encompassing socio-cultural realities that can contribute to well-being will have to be programmed.

We need to join hands in this journey. Together we can create a better ageing plan that will help us prevent dementia, and if and when the inevitable happens, enable us to live with dementia.



The Memory Garden



Attitudes to Dementia: World Alzheimer Report 2024 survey | Information for participants

Complete and learn from this Alzheimer's disease International survey. Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) has launched the 2024 Attitudes Towards Dementia global survey to gain a truly global perspective on attitudes to dementia everywhere.

The survey is open to

- People with dementia
- Caregivers
- Medical professionals
- The general public.

It only takes 10 to 15 minutes! It would be great to get your view. Follow the link to take part in the survey

👉 <http://tinyurl.com/bde9w8sf>

IDENTIFICATION BRACELETS

A patient with cognitive impairment who wanders outside alone can easily become confused, injured and get lost. An identification bracelet can help a loved one with dementia to get back home safely.

The personalized bracelets are available at the Foundation.

The bracelet is a tough yet supple device, with rounded edges to protect sensitive skin, hypo allergic; designed to prevent wearer's removal, water and sweat resistant and is personalised with contact details of the family carer.



Hypoallergenic and Tamperproof ID bracelets are now available at

The Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation

Inquiries Call 011 2667080 / 2667082 / 2667084

or

Mobile No: 076 0827080

DATES TO REMEMBER

EVENTS CALENDER 2024

September

7th September - Run to Remember

21st September - World Alzheimer's Day

&

Annual Memory Walk

November

9th November - Grand Sale

December

6th December - Christmas Party

Current Services

- Raising awareness and eradicating stigma
- Education on risk reduction
- Education on care management
- Helpline +94 11 2667080
- Memory screening / assessments done twice a month on Fridays
- Activity Centre
- Quarterly newsletter
- Resource Centre/ Information and resource materials
- Caregiver support group (CSG) meeting
- Memory Garden Cafe
- Identification bracelet
- Website : www.alzlanka.org
- www.facebook.com/alzlanka

Caregiver Support Group (CSG)

Online meetings are conducted every 1st & 3rd Tuesdays of the month from 7.30pm - 8.30pm

- support caregivers through discussion and sharing
- listen and learn from care experiences
- share common concerns
- work towards caregivers' wellness
- help to dispel misconceptions and stigma

Collaboration :

- Sensitize medical students of the Kelaniya University & the Kotelawala Defense University on non-pharmacological approaches to Dementia.
- Practical training for students of the speech therapy unit of the Kelaniya University.

The Board of Directors

**Prof. Shehan Williams (President), Lakmali Cabral (Secretary), Lilani Jayasuriya (Treasurer),
Beverley Mirando , Priya Fernando, Romany Parakrama, Nimal Gunewardena**

The Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation is a community based charity and relies on donations in order to sustain the services provided to persons with dementia and their family cares.

Your support makes a difference - please give generously

Cheques should be crossed and made payable to the **Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation** and sent to Lanka Alzheimer's Foundation, 110 Ketawalamulla Lane, Colombo 10, Sri Lanka

Monthly/Annual donation can be made directly to

Account number: 106110117418

Swift Code NDBSLKLX ,

National Development Bank PLC , Havelock Town Branch, (formerly Jawatte Branch)

117, Havelock Road, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Please notify the LAF Office to acknowledge receipt of your donation.