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QUALITY EDUCATION AND HEALTH SCIENCE FOR PATIENT BENEFIT

Interview Series

## *The Multifaceted Journey of Dr. Jeyasingam Jeyasugiththan: The Evolving Role of Medical Physicists and Insights for SCMPCR*

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The South Asia Centre for Medical Physics and Cancer Research (SCMPCR) is dedicated to strengthening the fields of medical physics and cancer research across South Asia, with the overarching objective of improving patient care and advancing global health. Through a range of structured teaching and training programmes, SCMPCR actively addresses the region-specific challenges faced by medical physicists. What began as a visionary initiative by pioneering leaders has evolved into a phase of dynamic growth, driven by strategic collaborations and meaningful partnerships. Building on these early efforts, SCMPCR has accelerated its progress through innovative and impactful training initiatives.

The SCMPCR Newsletter is one such initiative that celebrates the achievements of medical physicists and highlights ongoing professional activities, fostering sustainable partnerships and collaborative efforts across South Asia.

In this exclusive interview, we have the privilege of interacting with **Dr. Jeyasingam Jeyasugiththan**, a distinguished medical physicist and nuclear scientist from Sri Lanka, and the first and former Chief Editor of the SCMPCR Newsletter. Currently a Professor in the Department of Nuclear Sciences at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, Dr. Jeyasingam has made substantial contributions to academic development, clinical practice, and professional capacity building in medical physics, not only in Sri Lanka and South Asia, but also extending to Papua New Guinea.

In this conversation, Dr. Jeyasingam reflects on his association with SCMPCR, shares insights from his editorial journey, and discusses the organisation's growth and its pivotal role in advancing medical physics and cancer research. He also offers expert perspectives on the evolving landscape of medical physics, highlighting technological advances



**EXPERT:** Dr. Jeyasingam Jeyasugiththan  
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alongside persistent regional challenges. Presented below is a curated excerpt from the discussion between **Dr. Mary Joan (MJ)** and **Dr. Jeyasingam Jeyasugithan (JJ)**, focusing on his contributions and involvement in establishing SCMPCR activities.

**MJ:** Glad to have this opportunity to hear from you. Could you please share your early experiences and what motivated you to pursue medical physics as a career?

**JJ:** I initially studied physics at the undergraduate level, where I developed a strong interest in its medical applications. During my master's programme in medical physics, I gained a deeper understanding of how fundamental physics principles could be directly applied to improve human health. This experience strongly motivated me to pursue medical physics as my professional career.

While I was completing my MSc in Medical Physics, there was a proposal to establish a cancer treatment centre in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. At that time, Prof. Nagalingam Suntharalingam from the USA, widely known as Prof. Suntha was working closely with the provincial government to support the establishment of this centre at Tellippalai Base Hospital. Through a colleague, I was introduced to Prof. Suntha, as the hospital required a medical physicist. Following several discussions with him and the Regional Directorate of Health Services, Jaffna, I was appointed as a contract Medical Physicist in 2005 and later confirmed as a permanent Medical Physicist in 2016.

Prof. Suntha also arranged three months of clinical training for me in India under the supervision of Prof. Paul Ravindran at Christian Medical College, Prof. Challapalli Srinivas at Kasturba Medical College, and Prof. Thayalan at Chennai Medical College.

Over the next 14 years, I worked as a clinical medical physicist and played a key role in establishing medical physics services at Tellippalai Base Hospital and Jaffna Teaching Hospital.

Subsequently, I was awarded the opportunity to pursue my PhD at the University of Cape Town, where I conducted my research at the iThemba LABS proton beam facility. After completing my PhD, I joined the Department of Nuclear Sciences at the University of Colombo as an academic medical physicist. Alongside my academic role, I continue to contribute clinically by training and mentoring junior medical physicists and teaching at the master's and doctoral levels.

**MJ:** You have personally nurtured many collaborations for SCMPCR. Could you enlighten us on the early status of the organisation and the challenges faced?



**JJ:** During the early stages of SCMPCR, collaboration was both our greatest strength and our most significant challenge. The centre was still developing its identity, and many medical physicists in the region were not fully aware of SCMPCR or its objectives. One of the main challenges was connecting professionals across different countries, institutions, and clinical settings, particularly when resources, infrastructure, and training opportunities varied considerably across South Asia.

Another major challenge was limited funding and logistical support, especially from countries such as Sri Lanka. In recent years, Sri Lanka experienced a severe

economic crisis following the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, many SCMPCR activities relied heavily on voluntary contributions, personal networks, and the dedication of a small group of committed professionals.

Despite these constraints, there was a strong shared vision among the founding members to improve education, training, and research in medical physics and cancer care across the region. Building trust and long-term partnerships took time, but through regular interactions, workshops, newsletters, and academic exchanges, SCMPCR gradually gained recognition and credibility.

These early challenges helped shape SCMPCR into a resilient and collaborative organisation and reinforced the importance of teamwork, regional cooperation, and sustained commitment, principles that continue to guide its activities today.

**MJ:** Your contributions have shaped the SCMPCR Newsletter into what it is today. Could you share how you overcame the challenges you faced and your thoughts on its future prospects?

**JJ:** Developing the SCMPCR Newsletter was both challenging and highly rewarding. In the initial stages, one of the main difficulties was ensuring regular contributions while maintaining consistent quality, particularly with very limited resources. Many contributors were busy clinicians or academics, and coordinating content and meeting deadlines required persistence and continuous engagement.

I addressed these challenges primarily through teamwork and direct communication. By encouraging young medical physicists, reaching out to senior professionals, and building trust within the community, we were able to create a platform where contributors felt motivated to share their work and experiences. Strong support from SCMPCR leadership and regional collaborators was also crucial in sustaining the newsletter.

Looking ahead, I envision the SCMPCR Newsletter evolving into a more interactive and regionally inclusive platform. It has significant potential to highlight research activities, training opportunities, and success stories across South Asia, while also fostering collaboration with international partners. With continued commitment and effective leadership, the newsletter can further strengthen the medical physics community and support SCMPCR's long-term goals.

**MJ:** How do you view the current professional scenario for medical physicists in South Asia?

**JJ:** The professional landscape for medical physicists in South Asia reflects both encouraging progress and ongoing challenges. On the positive side, there is increasing recognition of the critical role played by medical physicists, particularly in diagnostic imaging. Many countries in the region are expanding radiotherapy and imaging services, which has led to a growing demand for trained professionals.

However, disparities persist across countries in terms of training standards, availability of equipment and funding, career recognition, and opportunities for professional development. In certain regions, medical physicists face limited career progression and a lack of structured continuing education programmes.

Despite these challenges, the outlook remains optimistic. Regional organisations such as SCMPCR, in collaboration with universities and international agencies, are making meaningful contributions to education, training, and professional networking. With sustained regional cooperation, standardised training pathways, and robust professional support, the role of medical physicists in South Asia will continue to expand and strengthen.

**MJ:** Could you share some of your most memorable experiences from your collaborations with SCMPCR?

**JJ:** My most memorable experiences with SCMPCR stem from the strong sense of teamwork and shared purpose. Collaborating with colleagues from different South Asian countries each facing unique challenges yet offering distinct strengths was both inspiring and fulfilling.

One particularly memorable aspect was the early development of the SCMPCR Newsletter. Bringing together contributions from clinicians, academics, and early-career professionals created a shared platform for communication and learning. Witnessing the enthusiasm of young medical physicists, especially when their work was acknowledged and published, was deeply encouraging.



I also value the collaborations developed through SCMPCR training programmes, workshops, and academic exchanges. These initiatives not only enhanced professional skills but also fostered lasting professional relationships built on trust and mutual respect. Overall, my experiences with SCMPCR have been profoundly meaningful, demonstrating the power of regional collaboration in advancing medical physics and improving patient care.

**MJ:** What future prospects should medical physicists in South Asia prepare for?

**JJ:** Medical physicists in South Asia must prepare for a rapidly evolving professional environment. Emerging technologies, including the integration of artificial intelligence into medicine, are transforming clinical practice. Medical physicists must continuously update their knowledge and skills to ensure safe and effective implementation of these technologies.

There will also be an increasing demand for expertise in radiation dose optimisation, quality assurance, and patient safety, particularly as diagnostic imaging and radiotherapy services continue to expand. Competencies in data analysis, research methodology, programming, and clinical problem-solving will become increasingly important.

Furthermore, medical physicists should be prepared to assume leadership, teaching, and advisory roles within healthcare systems. Regional collaboration, continuous professional development, and adherence to international standards will be essential. By remaining adaptable and committed to lifelong learning, medical physicists in South Asia can play a pivotal role in shaping the future of healthcare.

**MJ:** What advice would you offer to young medical physicists in South Asia regarding career development?



**JJ:** My advice to young medical physicists is to build a strong foundation in clinical practice, research, and emerging areas such as artificial intelligence. Always prioritise patient safety, quality assurance, and a clear understanding of how your work directly influences patient outcomes. Research skills are as important as theoretical knowledge.

I strongly encourage continuous learning and staying updated with new technologies, guidelines, and international standards. Take advantage of training programmes offered by SCMPCR,

participate in workshops, and engage in online learning. Seeking mentorship from senior professionals within the South Asian region can be extremely valuable.

Networking and collaboration are equally important. Engage actively with regional and international professional organisations such as SCMPCR, attend conferences, and disseminate your work through presentations and publications. Career growth requires patience and perseverance, but with dedication, ethical practice, and teamwork, young medical physicists can build fulfilling careers that meaningfully contribute to healthcare in South Asia.

**MJ:** SCMPCR is planning to venture into publishing a medical physics journal in the coming years. What groundwork is required before initiating such an endeavour?

**JJ:** Before launching a medical physics journal, SCMPCR must establish a strong foundation. First, the scope and objectives of the journal should be clearly defined, addressing regional needs while maintaining international scientific standards. A competent and diverse editorial board, comprising experts from South Asia and international collaborators, will be essential.

Second, transparent editorial policies and ethical guidelines must be developed, covering peer-review processes, authorship criteria, and publication ethics. Training editors and reviewers to ensure high-quality and timely peer review will be critical.

In addition, SCMPCR should establish a reliable digital publication platform with efficient manuscript submission and tracking systems. Encouraging high-quality submissions through research training programmes, workshops, and mentorship initiatives will help generate robust content. With careful planning, strong leadership, and community engagement, SCMPCR can successfully establish a reputable medical physics journal serving both regional and global audiences.

**MJ:** What is your vision for SCMPCR, and where should the organisation focus its efforts in the coming years?

**JJ:** My vision is for SCMPCR to evolve into a leading regional centre for education, training, and research in medical physics and cancer care. The organisation should continue to prioritise capacity building in South Asia by delivering high-quality training programmes, workshops, and mentorship opportunities, particularly for early-career professionals.

Moving forward, SCMPCR should focus on standardising education and training across the region, promoting collaborative research, and strengthening clinical practice through quality assurance and patient safety initiatives. Increased attention should also be given to emerging areas such as artificial intelligence, advanced radiotherapy techniques, and modern imaging technologies.

Enhancing SCMPCR's digital presence through online learning platforms and publications, including the proposed medical physics journal, will be vital. By strengthening partnerships with universities, hospitals, and international organisations, SCMPCR can play a transformative role in shaping the future of medical physics in South Asia and improving healthcare outcomes for patients.

**MJ:** This conversation with Dr. Jeyasingam Jeyasugiththan offers a compelling reflection on the evolving role of medical physicists in South Asia and the power of sustained regional collaboration. His professional journey spanning clinical service, academic leadership, research excellence, and capacity building, epitomises the spirit of commitment and resilience that SCMPCR seeks to nurture. Dr. Jeyasingam's insights highlight not

only the remarkable progress achieved in medical physics across the region but also the challenges that continue to demand collective effort, innovation, and vision. His contributions to the establishment of SCMPCR initiatives, particularly the SCMPCR Newsletter, underscore the importance of platforms that amplify professional voices, encourage mentorship, and foster a culture of shared learning. As SCMPCR moves forward, his perspectives reaffirm the need to strengthen education and training, embrace emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, and uphold the highest standards of patient safety and quality assurance. Most importantly, this dialogue serves as an inspiration to young medical physicists, reminding us that meaningful progress is built through collaboration, ethical practice, and an unwavering focus on improving patient care.

On behalf of SCMPCR, I extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Jeyasingam Jeyasugiththan for his enduring contributions and thoughtful reflections. His journey and vision continue to guide and inspire our collective efforts toward advancing medical physics and cancer care across South Asia.