

# A NURSE'S SERVICE IS EQUAL TO A DOCTOR'S SAYS GNOA

BY UMESH MORAMUDALI

**W**hen the cold war between the doctors and nurses reached a different level over allowances Health is Wealth interviewed the Government Nursing Officers' Association (GNOA) President, Saman Ratnapriya. Following are excerpts of the interview:

**Q.** GNOA has been demanding several demands from the government. The interim budget was presented to Parliament recently. How do you see that?

**A:** Throughout our struggle, we have demanded a Rs10,000 salary increment to public servants, which we have received from the interim budget. We thank the government for it. Nurses work for long hours and sometimes they have to work three or four shifts, due to the shortage of nurses in the country. However, in the medical service it is doctors who are receiving many benefits while other professionals do not receive such benefits.

**Q.** There are several concerns over the allowances provided from the previous budget. GNOA even engaged in a strike regarding the issue. What is the current situation regarding these allowances and has it been solved?

**A:** The issue is still there and yet to be solved. From the budget 2015, presented by the former President Rajapaksa the DAT allowance of doctors was increased from Rs 25,000 to Rs 40,000. This is in addition to the other allowances, such as the telephone allowance and the cost of living allowance

received by the doctors. However, nurses do not receive any allowance apart from uniform allowance received twice a year. The service of a nurse is equally important as that of a doctor in the medical service.

We strongly opposed the decision of the previous government to provide salary increments to doctors while ignoring nurses. Due to our countrywide strike the allowance provided to doctors was stopped. However, a proper solution was not provided. Nurses also should get the allowance and we will fight to get it.



Saman Ratnapriya

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**Q.** Does that mean nurses are receiving step motherly treatment?

**A:** Yes. If you take the medical administration it is entirely managed by the doctors. As a result of that the opportunities provided to other professionals are very much less. Doctors are selfish and attempt to dominate the health sector. This must stop and other professionals in the health sector too should get opportunities.

**Q.** Has there been any attempt to co-operate with the doctors regarding any of these issues?

**A:** There were instances where we worked together. For example when the issue about milk powder arose we worked together. We are willing to compromise and work together for the betterment of the health sector.

**Q.** Doctors claim that the GNOA is jealous of them and professionals like doctors deserve a better salary and better privileges. What do you have to say about this?

**A:** No we are not. Why should we be? We raise our voice for true concerns. It is clear that one section of the health sector faces injustice while a certain section is being benefited.

**Q.** Although you speak about equal treatment and being dominated by doctors, nurses tried to dominate midwives. What do you have to say about that?

**A:** That was an entirely different issue. In fact it became a huge issue due to the unnecessary intervention of doctors. Nurses having midwifery training is good for the health sector and doctors have no right to talk about a training provided to another profession.

# WE'LL STRIKE IF DAT ALLOWANCE IS NOT PAID WITH FEBRUARY SALARY

— GMOA

BY UMESH MORAMUDALI

**F**or about year or so there has been a cold war between the doctors and nurses. The latest clash of this cold war is the issue over the DAT allowance provided to doctors. Health is Wealth interviewed the Assistant Secretary of the GMOA Dr. Nalinda Herath regarding this matter. Following are the excerpts of the interview.

**Q.** Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA) had raised its concerns about the interim budget presented to Parliament recently. Why are the doctors not satisfied about the provisions of the interim budget?

**A:** From the Budget 2015, the allowance increments were provided to professionals such as judges, university teachers and doctors. For doctors this was provided in the form of Disturbance, Availability and Transport (DAT) allowance which was increased by Rs 15,000.

However, due to the strong protest of nurses, the circular issued by the Finance Ministry halted the increment allowances of doctors. Yet the allowance was received by the judges and university teachers. Subsequently the doctors had to face injustice.

In order to resolve the matter, we requested discussions with the Finance Minister and Health Minister regarding the matter.

**Q.** Nurses' Unions already receive sufficient allowances and further increase of allowances is not needed. Why is it important to increase allowance for doctors?

**A:** It is essential to provide the DAT increment for doctors and it is a good incentive for doctors to remain in the public service. It is a very well-known fact that many professionals had left the public service. However, doctors remain in the public service and provide a great service to the public. It is the duty of the government to provide them with the necessary payments.

**Q.** In line with your demands to increase allowances nurses too, demand an allowance of Rs 15,000. Should they not receive the same allowance?

**A:** First nurses should understand what the DAT allowance is. Doctors are in on call duty hence, they are supposed to come to work any time they are called. Even in the middle of the night, if a patient is admitted to the hospital doctors are supposed to come to work. That is why it is called Disturbance, Availability and Transport (DAT).

Nurses are not on call duty. Therefore, there is no need for a DAT allowance for nurses.

**Q.** Does that mean nurses should not get any allowance?

**A:** We do not say so. There are different allowances relating to different professions. A labourer does not get the allowances that a nurse gets because the work of a nurse is different from a labourer's work. It is the same with the doctors and nurses.

Saman Ratnapriya who call himself a nurses' union leader does not truly



Dr. Nalinda Herath

**WE DEMAND THE GOVERNMENT TO ADD THE DAT ALLOWANCE TO OUR FEBRUARY SALARY. IF ALL THE OTHER PROFESSIONALS HAD RECEIVED IT, WHY NOT WE?**

represent the nurses. He has a different agenda and works according to his political motives.

**Q.** GNOA and several other unions claim that the doctors try to dominate the health sector. They further claim that the medical administration is dominated by doctors and other professionals in the health sector are ignored. Is that true?

**A:** There is no dominance as such. Referring to your question on medical administration, doctors are the most suitable professionals to do that. Doctors are given training on every work of the health sector. For example, doctors do have a laboratory training and basic training of all the other units of the health sector. No other health sector employees have such training. Therefore, it is important to appoint doctors as medical administrators as they have knowledge about every area of the health sector.

**Q.** There are accusations against GMOA that doctors do not allow other professions in the health sector to come up and you are jealous about them. What do you have to say about this?

**A:** We are not. It is the nurses who say so. Despite certain issues we have doctors who do visit nursing training schools and give lectures. Also doctors assist and teach nursing students who are in training in hospitals. We have never made an issue as such. If we are jealous we could have stopped conducting lectures, but we did not do so.

**Q.** As the doctors do not receive the expected increments from the interim budget what would be your next step?

**A:** We demand the government to add the DAT allowance to our February salary. If all the other professionals had received it, why not we? If this allowance was not added to the salary we will go on strike. That we will decide after the 25 February, the Central Committee of the GMOA will decide as to when we will go on strike.

However, as professionals we are willing to resolve the issue through discussions. As I told you earlier, we had requested discussions with the President, the Finance Minister and the Health Minister. Health Minister Rajitha Senarathne agreed to arrange a discussion with the Finance Minister. The government still has time to resolve the issue.