

## **Taking research to the next level**

On average the MRI does about 15 research projects for a year. Research Topics are selected on the requirement of the Ministry of Health, and the requirements of Doctors/Scientists working at MRI, Post graduate students and other collaborating research institutions. Funds for research are obtained from the Ministry of Health, from international Donor Agencies Such as WHO, JICA, WB, and ADB. A major source of potential funding is from doing contract research especially from the Pharmaceutical industry in the form of clinical trials. This source is grossly underutilized at present.

The benefits of research done at MRI are for the individuals as well as the State as shown by the following examples.

- The pioneering research done ay MRI helped to introduce the Intradermal Regimen for Post Exposure Prevention of Rabies. The savings due do this regimen runs into millions of rupees annually.
- Research done at the Department of nutrition has identified Iodine deficiency as the cause for endemic goiter in Sri Lanka. As a result adding of Iodine was made mandatory by law to common salt and the incidence of goiter is now greatly reduced.
- The types of immunodefficiency related diseases and their prevalence was virtually unknown in Sri Lanka. Due to the research done in MRI the types of immunodefficiency disease, there extent and the best mode of management of such disease have all bee been documented. Patients suffering from allergy now have the opportunity to have their diseases diagnosed and obtain appropriate advice on therapy to minimize the ill effects of their allergic condition.
- Pioneering research done by the entomology department of the MRI on the use of bacteria for control of mosquito larvae led to the use of BTI bacteria in the control of Dengue Fever.

## **Major constraints for research**

- Lack of staff trained in research
- Lack of funds
- Lack of research culture

## **The Future**

Sri Lanka is one of the lowest spending countries on R & D. Although our per capita income is above that of India we spend only 0.17 of GDP on research and development as opposed to India which spends 0.8% of GDP on R and D. As a result of this investment great advances have being made in research and development in India.

The money spent on research should be considered as a long term investment. The benefits of this long term investment would be

- To retain the best Human resources for R and D in this country
- To inculcate a research culture in future generations
- Self reliance on modern technology.
- Rapid growth of High Tech based industry in the fields of Engineering and Medicine

The MRI should have its own budgetary allocation for research. For a research institute to function efficiently there should be a certain degree of flexibility and autonomy given to that institute. Financial autonomy will allow the research institutes like MRI to carry out contract research in collaboration with other institutes and Industry. The monies collected from these projects could be utilized not only for the day to day activities of the institute but also to enhance its output in the following manner

- Hire staff of all categories to conduct and carry out research projects on a contract basis
- Provide the best training for staff at MRI by sending them for training workshops seminars and fellowships
- Conduct its own educational programs such as training courses, seminars and work shops
- Purchase equipment reagents and chemicals for use in R and D activities