

# **IMPLEMENTATION OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGE POLICY FOR MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS**

A Conceptual Proposal

By



## **Government Medical Officers' Association**

This Report is prepared upon the request of Secretaries Committee chaired by  
**Mr. S. Abeysinghe**, Secretary to the Cabinet Of Ministers and  
**Hon. Wasudewa Nanayakkara**, Cabinet Minister of National Language and  
Social Integration.

**21<sup>st</sup> December 2012**

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## Executive Summary

Medical Officers could be considered under three categories based on the language use, and first on-call doctors require the best language proficiency. Doctors have been examined for language abilities by exercising the service minute in regard to Medical Personnel. Contrary to the world norm, Sri Lankan doctors have changed the history by deploying government doctors to war affected areas. Even during these hard times or otherwise Medical Officer deployment was done based on merits and only on merit. In this event mother tongue of 90% of doctors appointed to North and East was Sinhala, but we have received no complaint based on language proficiency.

While welcoming the objective of language development introduced as the government policy, GMOA would suggest following proposals for a seamless service delivery.

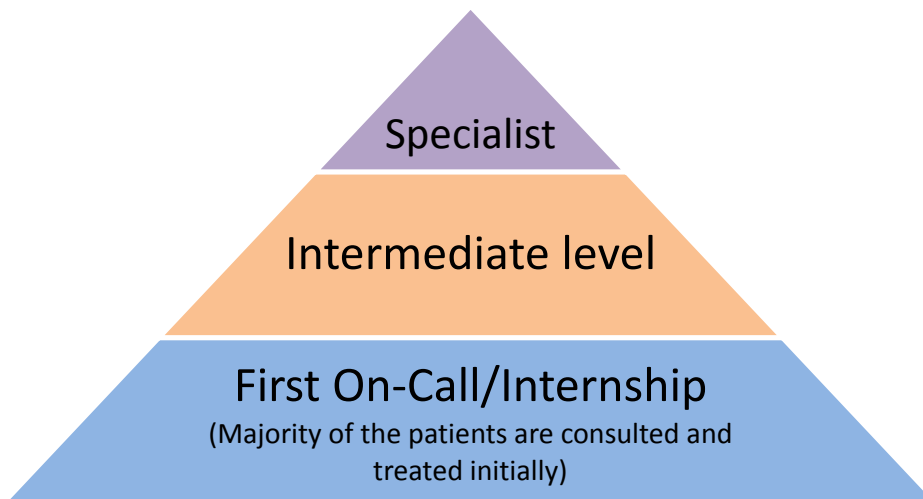
We also emphasize that all stakeholders and political leadership are in agreement to this proposal ensuring the feasibility of implementation of this proposal. We wish this will set an example to the rest.

## The Background

Medical Officers are the only public servants who have proved their ability to perform their duties in both languages around the island.

As far as the language use and importance of second language proficiency are concerned, doctors can be categorized in to three groups.

1. First on-call doctors / Internship
2. Intermediate level doctors
3. Specialist level doctors



Having considered the importance of language skills, all doctors are examined for language proficiency at their confirmation in the department of Health in accordance with the E Bar Examination. [Gazette notification no 662/11 dated 17.05.1991 section 7.1.5 /Health Service Minute (Annexure 01)]

In 2007, by Public Administration circular 07/2007 (Annexure 02), as a policy, government has introduced a language examination for all categories of Government servants.

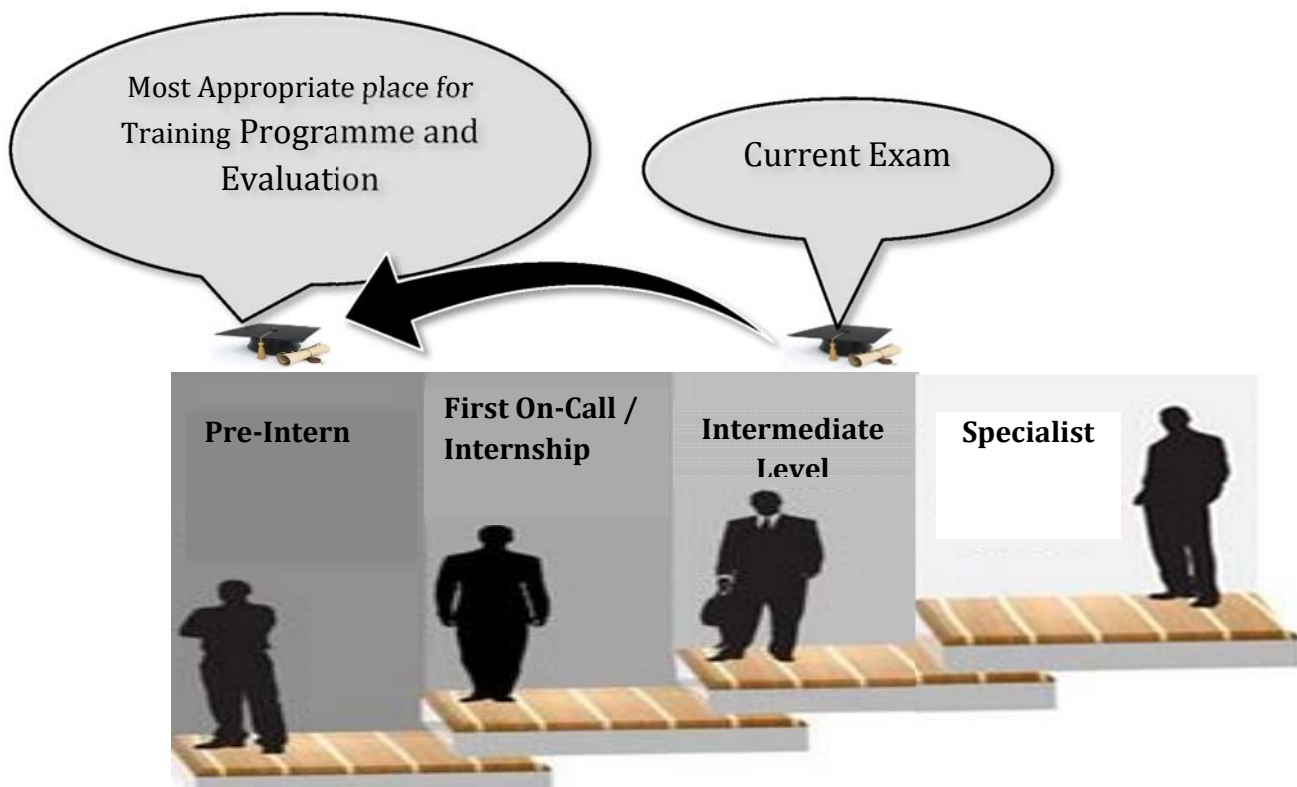
## Observations

- GMOA has been deploying medical officers in an equitable manner Island wide based on their merit positions and PURELY ON MERIT. We would like to emphasise the fact that placing medical officers were and still being done irrespective of their language proficiency.
- Most of the medical officers posted to North and East provinces were Sinhala speaking. Sri Lankan doctors have changed the history by sending government doctors to war affected territory contrary to the usual practice of handing over health care manpower to NGOs and INGOs.
- So far no complaint has been made on suboptimal medical care delivered due to language barriers of these doctors serving in North and East. Simply because these Medical officers obtain the required language proficiency soon upon their posting.
- However, GMOA would like to facilitate appropriate measures to improve language abilities of doctors.
- Therefore we wish to point out that just placing an exam will have no benefit. Ideally what is essential is a well-designed training programme and making necessary facilities, resources available to improve language abilities.
- We also wish to point out the value and the necessity of Medical Officers doing their Post Graduate exams to become specialists to fulfil the dearth of specialists in Sri Lanka. As such other activities should not affect these pathways which could result in bad repercussions in Health Care service delivery.
- Acquiring proper language proficiency and its maximum use is best suited during the first on-call level where majority of patient encounters are taken place. This language proficiency benefit will sustain throughout the career up to specialist level.
- Pre-intern period – usually about 10 months lag period between completion of MBBS final examinations at local state Medical Faculties and commencement of internship.
- The English language training done prior to University entry is a classic example where language training is best placed in.

## GMOA proposal to implement Government Policy in the best way

Considering above observations and welcoming the government policy on language development, GMOA wish to suggest following strategy to enhance the health care delivery services.

- To introduce the language exam at pre-intern period
- To introduce well designed language training programmes prior to examination
- Enhancing the resources to improve language abilities of doctors
- Oral testing in Tamil / Sinhala languages done at the E-bar examination (Gazette notification no 662/11 dated 17.05.1991 section 7.1.5) of present medical officers should be taken equivalent to this languages proficiency test in Sinhala/ Tamil tested under the category 3 suggested by the Public Administration circular 07/20074.
- Appointment of officers to implement these decisions in as a collaborative project



## Feasibility for successful Implementation

### Political willingness

Hon Wasudewa Nanayakkara was convinced about this attitude and dedication made by the GMOA and has committed his willingness to provide necessary legislative backing to this comprehensive and practical proposal

### Willingness of all stake holders

GMOA, Ministry of Health and Language Department are in agreement to implement these productive proposals.

### Fulfilling the government policy and the objective

This proposal will fulfil the government policy in a pragmatic and efficient manner. Once it is implemented, this proposal could be used as an example to the other sectors in the government.





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**The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**

EXTRAORDINARY

අංක 662/11 - 1991 මැයි 17 වැනි සිකුරාදා - 1991.05.17  
No. 662/11 - FRIDAY, MAY 17, 1991

(Published by Authority)

**PART I : SECTION (I) – GENERAL**

**Government Notifications**

**MINUTE IN REGARD TO MEDICAL PERSONNEL  
OF THE HEALTH SERVICES**

THE following minute in regard to medical personnel of the Health Services which has been approved by the Cabinet of Ministers is published for information.

The minute in regard to medical personnel of the Health Services published in the *Government Gazette* No. 14,840 of 17th February, 1969 is hereby cancelled.

V. K. Nanayakkara,  
Acting Secretary/Health and Women's Affairs.

Ministry of Health and Women's Affairs,  
Colombo,  
16th May, 1991.

**Minute in regard to Medical Personnel of the Health Services**

01. Composition of Department of Health Services
02. Number of posts of medical personnel
03. Salary scales for Medical Officers
04. Allowances
05. Appointments
06. Seniority

1A - D 13745 - 1.100 (91/05)

4 A

I කොටස : (I) දේශ - ශ්‍රී ලංකා ප්‍රජාතාන්ත්‍රික සමාජවාදී ජනරජයේ අති විශේෂ ගැසට් පත්‍රය - 1991.05.17

PART I : Sec. (I) - GAZETTE EXTRAORDINARY OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA - 1991.05.17

- 5.6.2. Medical Officers possessing qualifications listed in Appendix I of the Medical Services Minute as per *Gazette* Notification No. 14,840 of 07th February, 1969 and appointed to the Department on or after 01.01.1980, and fulfilled the requirements of the Post-Graduate Institute of Medicine of the University of Colombo and have obtained Board Certification are eligible for appointment as Specialist Medical Officers.
- 5.6.3. Medical Officers with qualifications listed in Appendix I of the Medical Services Minute as per *Gazette* Notification No. 14,840 of 07th February, 1969 and appointed to Specialist posts before 01.01.1990 or returned after 01.01.1980 within the stipulated period, who went on departmentally approved no-pay leave or scholarships, will continue to be recognised as Specialist Medical Officers.
- 5.6.4. Medical Officers in Grade II who have successfully completed the appropriate post-graduate training programme, and possessing qualifications as listed in Appendix I, and obtained Board Certification of the Post-Graduate Institute of Medicine, University of Colombo are eligible for appointment as Specialist Medical Officers.
- 5.6.5. Specialist Medical Officers appointed after 01.01.1980 in terms of sub-section 5.6.2 above will not be considered for a Teaching Hospital appointment until they have completed four years of service from the date of Board Certification.
- 5.6.6. Specialised Medical Officers appointed in terms of sub-section 5.6.2. and 5.6.4. will be paid Specialist salary from the date of Board Certification.

#### 6. Seniority :

##### 6.1 Seniority at appointment :

- 6.1.1. Seniority in the Health Services will be governed by the regulations of the Establishments Code.
- 6.1.2. Seniority among those appointed to the permanent service on the same date will be according to the order of merit in the Final examination.
- 6.1.3. The seniority for specialist appointments would be Grade II seniority. In the case of appointments to Teaching Hospitals, it will be on a point scheme. Four points for Preliminary Grade (2 points per year), 24 points for Grade II (2 points per year), and 2 points per year for each year of service in Grade I and Specialist Grade.

#### 7. Promotions :

##### 7.1 Scheme of Departmental Examinations for Medical Officers of Preliminary Grade.

- 7.1.1. All Medical Officers appointed to the Preliminary Grade will have to pass a Departmental examination within 2 years of the date of appointment before promotion to Grade II of the service. Medical Officers who had previously not passed the Departmental examination if appointed to a post in Specialist Grade or Administrative Grade, will be required to pass the Departmental examination within 2 years of their appointment. Failure to do so within the stipulated period would result in loss of seniority by the time taken in excess of two years to pass the Departmental examination, in addition to deferment of their second increment.
- 7.1.2. The examination will be held twice a year in the months of March and September.

7.1.3. Notice of the examination will be published in the *Government Gazette* a month before the exact date of the examination, and any officer in the Preliminary Grade irrespective of the length of his service may make his application to sit the examination.

7.1.4. If any officer fails to pass the examination within 2 years of appointment to the Preliminary Grade, his promotion to Grade II will be deferred by the period taken in excess of 2 years to pass the examination.

7.1.5. The examination will be a written examination with an oral examination for proficiency in Sinhala/Tamil. The oral examination will be conducted by staff officers in the Department of Health Services.

7.1.6. The purpose of this oral examination will be to find out whether the officers can converse fluently in either language on subjects which will arise in the course of their normal duties.

7.1.7. Officers must take up all the subjects at the first sitting of the examination. If an officer passes one or more of the subjects and fails in the others, he or she will be required to pass the subject or subjects at a subsequent examination.

7.1.8. *Syllabus - Part I.* - Written papers will be on -

- (i) Establishments Code - Two Hours paper,
- (ii) Accounts - Two Hours paper,
- (iii) Hospital and Dispensary Administration - One and a Half Hours.

7.1.9. Candidates are advised to pay special attention to -

- (i) General Regulations of Department of Health Services,
- (ii) Public Service Commission Rules,
- (iii) Establishments Code,
- (iv) Regulations for Stores Accounting, Department of Health,
- (v) Financial section of Manual of the Department of Health,
- (vi) Financial regulations applicable to day to day Administrative duties of a Medical Officer of Health.

7.2 The officers possessing the specified qualifications in Appendices I and II will be promoted to Grade I after 12 years in Grade II at the maximum of Grade II.

8. *Post-Graduate Examinations :*

8.1 The Registration fees along with examination fees of the Post-Graduate Institute of Medicine will be paid by the Government provided the officer passes the final post-Graduate examination at the first attempt.



Public Administration Circular 07/2007

My No. E/2/3/2/70  
Ministry of Public Administration  
and Home Affairs  
Independence Square  
Colombo - 07  
28 May, 2007

All Secretaries to Ministries  
Chief Secretaries of Provincial Councils and  
Heads of Departments

### **Implementation of Official Language Policy**

The Government has decided to implement the following provisions to enable the Public Servants to carry out their functions and duties both in Sinhala and Tamil since the two languages are official languages in terms of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

- (a) All officers recruited to the Public / Provincial Public Service with effect from 01.07.2007 should acquire proficiency in the other official language within a period of 5 years in addition to the official language through which they enter the service.
- (b) Proficiency in the official language required by the functions assigned to the respective posts consists of 3 levels as follows. Several services identified accordingly are indicated in the Annexure.
  - (I) Pass in Sinhala / Tamil at the G. C. E. (O/L) examination as a main subject (not as second language or optional language) and speech test conducted by the Department of official languages or pass in the special competence examination conducted by the Department of official languages. This provision is applicable to the category I in the Annexure.
  - (II) Pass in the test of the language course at secondary level examination conducted by the Department of official languages. This provision is applicable to the category 2 in the annexure.
  - (III) Pass in the test of the language course at preliminary level examination conducted by the Department of official languages. This provision is applicable to the category 3 in the annexure.
- (c) If the appointing authority considers that a section of officers who belong to a post/service specified in Annex, due to the nature of duties assigned to them, should acquire a higher level of language proficiency than the level stipulated for such post/service, a determination should be obtained on the requisite level of language proficiency by a recommendation made to the Director General of Establishments through the Secretary of the relevant Ministry. The Director General of Establishments shall seek recommendation of the Commission of Official Languages on such determination.

## Annexure

	Service / Posts	Standard of Proficiency to be acquired		
		Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
1	Sri Lanka Administrative Service	✓		
2	Sri Lanka Accountants' Service	✓		
3	Sri Lanka Planning Service	✓		
4	Sri Lanka Educational Administrative Service	✓		
5	Sri Lanka Agricultural Service	✓		
6	Inland Revenue Service	✓		
7	Sri Lanka Valuers' Service	✓		
8	Sri Lanka Audit Service	✓		
9	Judicial Officers	✓		
10	Assistant Superintendent of Police and above ranks in the Sri Lanka Police Service	✓		
11	Law officers	✓		
12	Sri Lanka Overseas Service	✓		
13	Sri Lanka Customs Service	✓		
14	Sri Lanka Scientific Service			✓
15	Sri Lanka Engineering Service			✓
16	Government Medical officers and Dental Medial Officers			✓
17	Sri Lanka Animal Production and Health Service			✓
18	Staff Grade officers who do not belong to Island Wide Services but engaged in departmental Services	✓		
19	Sri Lanka Surveyors' Service	✓		
20	Sri Lanka Architects' Service	✓		
21	Public Management Assistants Service and Similar Departmental Serviced		✓	
22	Officers below the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police in the Police Service		✓	
23	Grama Niladhari		✓	
24	All field officers engaged in extension Services (Services such as Technological Services)		✓	

<b>25</b>	Public Health Inspector		✓	
<b>26</b>	Receptionist		✓	
<b>27</b>	Sri Lanka Audit Examiners Service		✓	
<b>28</b>	Nursing Service			✓
<b>29</b>	Family Health Service		✓	
<b>30</b>	Librarians' Service			✓
<b>31</b>	Principals' Service	✓		
<b>32</b>	Minor Staff			✓

# Implementation of Official Language Policy for Medical Professionals

