Formal honouring by BSGE tomorrow

The South Asian Minimal Access Gynaecology & Endometriosis (SAMAGE) Centre within the Gynaecology & Endometriosis Professorial Unit at the Kalubowila Hospital within the Professional Unit Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Sri Jayewardenepura University will formally bestow the SAMAGE Centre with professional accreditation.

Before explaining to the Sunday Times what this honour of accreditation means, Dr. Dhammike Silva says that the BSGE was founded in 1989 by a small group of gynaecologists in the United Kingdom (UK), keen to promote the benefits of minimal access surgery for their patients.

Nearly 30 years hence, it has grown from strength to strength with a membership of more than 1,000 drawn from consultants, trainees, general practitioners and students, he says, quoting from its website that “the BSGE exists not only to serve its members, but also to promote knowledge and understanding of the endoscopic approach to diagnosis and treatment to a wider public, including patients and those responsible for the formulation of healthcare policy.” Thus the BSGE’s vision is to educate, train and encourage research.

Being at the top of the field of minimal access gynaecology, it initially set up a centre of excellence for endometriosis, as this disease is a major concern among women in the region as a burden, very high but gradually spread its expertise to dealing with other gynaecological issues, the Sunday Times learns.

Dr. Silva says that earlier it was believed that a “frozen pelvis” caused by severe endometriosis was inoperable. The thinking at that time was also that it was inoperable because it involved not only a woman’s reproductive organs such as the ovaries, fallopian tubes, womb (uterus) and vagina but also the bladder, the ureters (urinary tubes), the bowel (intestine) and the nerves in the area.

As such, it required a multidisciplinary approach.

“Only a very skilled surgeon could negotiate and navigate the endometriosis hit areas and resect or cut them out separately to deal with the disease,” he says, adding that “vena, venas resens core.”

In those days, only medical and not surgical treatment was offered to the patient who suffered throughout her life.

However, a skilled and experienced laparoscopic gynaecologist can skeletonize and isolate the bowel, the ureters, the ovary, the ovaries, the vagina and the nerves and clear all these of endometriotic deposits. Citing examples, Dr. Silva says that the procedure may entail dissecting some parts of the affected ureters and re-implanting them or exposing and raising the nerve plexus (complex branching networks) for nerve-sparing.

All this and more are being performed at the Kalubowila Hospital, as the team guided by Dr. Silva has acquired strong laparoscopic skills.

Stressing that such minimal access procedures, which last many hours cannot be performed by surgeons and be left to a multidisciplinary team required as: A Gynaecologist with special training in laparoscopy, a Colorectal Surgeon, a Urologist, a Pain Consultant, and a Specialist Nurse who would meticulously handle the nitty-gritty of pre, intra and post operative periods, with the latter part lasting two years.

In the UK, according to Dr. Silva, the are accredited Endometriosis Centre of Excellence to which referrals are sent from all over the country. So far, the one-and-only such centre with provisional accreditation for Southeast Asia is the SAMAGE Centre at the Kalubowila Hospital.

Now that provisional accreditation has been granted, the SAMAGE Centre will be under rigorous scrutiny and stringent evaluation by two international collaborators of BSGE along with training of Sri Lankan surgeons.

Data and videos sent by the SAMAGE Centre of pre-operation procedures and minimal access surgeries will be studied scrupulously and a final audit conducted at the end of the year, to decide whether it has lived up to the high standards required, to get full accreditation.

The Kalubowila Gynaecological Team comprises Consultant Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Dr. Dhammike Silva and Dr. Madura Jayawardane; Consultant General-Urinary Surgeon Prof. Srinath Chandrasekera; Consultant Colorectal Surgeon Dr. Bhanawanta Gunawardena; Consultant Anaesthetist Dr. Nilangani Lamahewa with a special interest in pain management; and Specialist Nurse Himali Moshabe who has been working in the country for nearly 15 years and thought the time was right to reach out for international accreditation.

“Minimal-access surgeries have been used not only for endometriosis and that too the really bad Grade 4 stage but also for everything else,” he says, ticking off on his fingers some of the others who require minimal access surgeries, including fibroids, adhesions, fistula, bladder procedures, stacks, ovarian, endometriosis and any other gynaecological cancers including ovarian cancer.

“Nokaranu Aga na?” he says simply (“There’s nothing we don’t do.”)

Underscoring that the best form or optimal treatment for endometriosis is minimal access surgery delivered by a multidisciplinary team, Dr. Silva says that due to lack of expertise and skill, many a patient regrettably gets sub-optimal treatment going from one open surgery to another, getting more and more adhesions within the body. This needs to change.

Therefore, the Kalubowila team has also been holding exposure training and outreach clinics with the blessings of the Sri Lanka College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in Embilipitiya, Kachuwatte, Homagama and Nawalapitiya.

Come January 2019, the Kalubowila team is hoping to stand alone their accomplishments with full accreditation from the BSGE in hand, offering undeniable proof that they are world-class.

By Kumundini Hettiarachchi