Forging Ahead in the Diagnostic Ecosystem

Dr. A A Mohamed Haroon, Chairman of Colombo Medilab, has driven an institution that started when they were scarce in the country with a patient-first philosophy, investment in innovation, and a legacy of consistent quality; he says those truly differentiate them. Today, Colombo Medilab is poised to welcome the next generation to its management, a generation of medical professionals studying abroad. They will return to serve Sri Lanka through Colombo Medilab, ensuring this establishment continues its trusted service. In conversation with Business Today, Dr. Haroon spoke about what differentiates their services and their management philosophy that has ensured consistency and longevity. He also talked about the evolving diagnostic landscape in Sri Lanka and the way forward to provide reliable and quality-centered excellence whose focus will be their patients and patrons.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane. **Photography** Sujith Heenatigala.



Dr. A A Mohamed Haroon, Chairman, Colombo Medilab.

What inspired the founding of Colombo Medilab, and how has the vision evolved?

Colombo Medilab was founded in 1988 by my late brother, Dr. Mohamad Iqbal, and myself. My brother and I graduated from the King Edward Medical College in Lahore. Coming from a business family deeply entrenched in the textile industry, our foray into the medical field marked a significant departure from tradition.

Upon our return, we observed a significant gap in the availability of integrated diagnostic and treatment services. At the time, such comprehensive care offerings

were only available through large private hospitals, leaving a considerable portion of the population without convenient or affordable access to diagnostic and clinical care under one roof. We saw an opportunity to fill this void and believed that a more patient- centric, accessible model was possible and necessary.

From the beginning, our ambition was to establish a medical facility and redefine how healthcare services were delivered, focusing on prompt, courteous, and compassionate care. Our mission has always been clear: to serve the community by providing reliable, high-quality, and cost-effective healthcare services. We were particularly committed to offering specialized laboratory diagnostics with the highest standards of accuracy and efficiency.

Over the past 35 years, our journey has been consistent growth and adaptation. We started small, but our vision was always expansive. We've steadily scaled our operations, introduced advanced technologies, and broadened our service offerings in response to the evolving needs of our patients and the healthcare industry. Our commitment to our founding values of integrity, affordability, and genuine service to the community has remained unchanged.

Today, Colombo Medilab is a trusted name in the healthcare sector with a loyal client base. We take pride in our reputation built on medical expertise and the relationships we have nurtured over time. Our continued success is a testament to the trust our patients place in us, and we remain dedicated to honoring that trust by upholding the standards and vision upon which we built this institution.

What differentiates Colombo Medilab from other diagnostic centers in Colombo and Sri Lanka?

Our defining differentiator has always been our unwavering commitment to service excellence. Since our inception, our core priority has been to place patient care at the center of everything we do. We are not merely a diagnostic center but a healthcare partner constantly striving to offer a warm, welcoming, and compassionate environment to everyone who walks through our doors.

What sets us apart is the holistic experience we provide, where clinical accuracy, patient comfort, and technological advancement come together seamlessly. From maintaining a clean, hygienic, and calming environment to investing in the latest diagnostic technologies and equipment, we ensure that our services are both cutting-edge and accessible. This balance between high-end technology and

human-centered care has enabled us to establish a trusted reputation in Colombo and beyond.

We also distinguish ourselves through our commitment to continuous improvement. The healthcare landscape constantly evolves, and we recognize the importance of staying ahead of the curve. Whether through ongoing staff training, upgrading diagnostic tools, or adopting best practices in patient care, we remain agile and responsive to change. This adaptability has allowed us to maintain high accuracy, reliability, and efficiency standards in our service delivery over the decades.

Furthermore, our longevity in the industry is a testament to our consistency, resilience, and ability to meet the needs of generations of patients. While many centers have come and gone, Colombo Medilab has remained a steadfast provider of trusted healthcare diagnostics built on integrity, empathy, and professionalism.

How do you maintain high standards of quality and reliability in your lab services?

Maintaining accuracy, reliability, and consistency in our diagnostic services is paramount to us. We have adopted the internationally recognized External Quality Assurance Services (EQAS) to achieve this. This external quality assessment program enables us to benchmark our performance against other laboratories with similar methodologies and equipment worldwide. By participating in EQAS, we can validate the accuracy of our test results through regular comparison and performance evaluation, ensuring that our standards remain on par with leading global laboratories.

Moreover, as an accredited partner laboratory for pre- employment medical testing for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, we are subject to rigorous annual audits conducted by a team of medical professionals appointed by the GCC. These audits encompass all facets of our operation, including laboratory processes, equipment calibration, quality control protocols, data management, and overall service delivery. This inspection is carried out each year by visiting foreign health ministry delegates comprising specialist medical consultants and laboratory experts GCC states. To date, we have consistently met and exceeded these standards, which has allowed our partnership with the GCC to continue uninterrupted. This relationship with the GCC places significant responsibility on our laboratory, as the results we generate for individuals seeking employment in GCC countries must match those verified upon their arrival abroad. A single discrepancy can result in

immediate penalties—often thousands of dollars— and could jeopardize our status as an approved center. This stringent system incentivizes us to maintain unwavering accuracy and vigilance in every test we perform. It also reflects our deep commitment to clinical integrity and international accountability.

In addition to EQAS and GCC compliance, we work closely with Quality Control Validation (QCV) laboratories. We send samples for independent validation and quality control testing at regular intervals. These QCV labs assess our tests' performance and equipment's calibration and accuracy. We undertake this process every few months to ensure our machinery's calibration and testing procedures meet established quality benchmarks. Upon successful validation, we receive certification, which is an endorsement of our adherence to industry best practices.

Implementing internal quality control (QC) procedures is critical to these validation processes. QC involves routine testing of materials and outputs to verify that our processes yield consistent, accurate, and repeatable results. These checks are seamlessly integrated into our operational workflow, swiftly identifying and correcting potential deviations.

Additionally, our audits extend beyond laboratory operations to include an assessment of clinical and support staff, particularly our nursing personnel. The GCC evaluators closely examine their qualifications, clinical skills, and adherence to procedural standards. This holistic approach underscores the importance of professionalism and competence across all service delivery areas. We implement rigorous quality control protocols across every stage of our testing process, all meticulously overseen by a team of highly qualified professionals, including a consultant pathologist, a clinical pathologist, and a biochemical pathologist.

Given the comprehensive measures we have in place, we strongly advocate for establishing a national regulatory body to oversee and standardize the operations of diagnostic laboratories in Sri Lanka. The sector lacks uniform oversight, and unregulated diagnostic centers have proliferated, often operating without quality controls. That has led to discrepancies in test results and diminished public trust in private laboratory services. Along with others in the diagnostic community, we have been actively lobbying to create a regulatory framework to elevate industry-wide standards, ensure consistency, and ultimately improve public health outcomes nationwide.



Dr Sabreena Haroon Admani, CEO/General Practitioner.

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How do you ensure a seamless and trustworthy experience for patients?

Delivering a seamless, trustworthy, and patient-centered experience is at the core of everything we do. Our approach is built on accessibility, transparency, and continuity of care, ensuring patients feel supported and valued at every step of their healthcare journey.

In addition to our advanced diagnostic laboratory services, we operate a fully functional Outpatient Department (OPD), open from 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. daily. This extended service window allows patients to consult with general practitioners and specialists at their convenience.

Our integrated model enables individuals to undergo medical consultations, receive diagnostic testing, and obtain treatment recommendations—all under one roof. This end-to-end service saves time and enhances accuracy and coordination of care.

Patients who walk into our facility with health concerns first receive a comprehensive clinical examination. Based on initial assessments, we refer them for relevant diagnostic tests at our facility, or, if they prefer, they can perform those tests externally. Our commitment to patient care remains unchanged regardless of where they conduct the tests. Once the results are available, our physicians review the findings and initiate treatment or provide referrals to specialists when further intervention is necessary. This flexibility reinforces trust and empowers patients to make informed choices regarding their care.

One of the key reasons for our high patient retention and loyalty is the consistent quality of care and personal attention we offer. Over the years, word-of-mouth referrals have been a significant driver of our growth and a strong endorsement of our community’s trust. We seek patient feedback to understand their experience and continuously improve our services. If a patient has encountered an issue or has concerns about any part of their interaction with us, we take it seriously and strive to resolve it promptly. For us, patient feedback is not just a formality but an essential tool for quality improvement.

To further support convenience and accessibility, we have established a dedicated WhatsApp hotline, which has become an invaluable communication tool. Patients who have consulted us and later undergone diagnostic testing elsewhere can send their reports via WhatsApp, allowing us to review their results and provide expert medical guidance remotely. That added flexibility ensures that patients always have a trusted medical opinion within reach, no matter where they are.

While we do not offer inpatient services or overnight stays, our comprehensive outpatient care model and a full spectrum of diagnostic capabilities ensure that patients receive holistic care efficiently and effectively. They can consult qualified medical professionals, receive precise diagnostics, and receive guidance on the next steps without navigating multiple healthcare facilities. Our patrons also include several diplomatic missions, other expatriates, several major airlines and hotels.

We also offer specialized house visits for private patients, diplomatic offcers and other expatriates are available as well.

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What can you tell us about your customized health packages?

Our customized health packages are one of our most distinctive offerings. We design them to deliver targeted, preventive healthcare solutions tailored to each individual’s needs. These packages go beyond the standard approach by factoring in age, gender, lifestyle, and medical history, enabling us to provide meaningful insights and early intervention where necessary.

We offer a wide range of packages, each thoughtfully curated to address the unique health concerns of different demographic groups. That includes general health screening packages for men and women of all ages, specialized packages for individuals over the age of 50, focusing on age-related risks such as cardiovascular health, diabetes, osteoporosis, and more, budget-friendly packages that ensure affordability without compromising diagnostic quality, and pre-marital or honeymoon health packages, aimed at helping couples start their new life together with a clear understanding of their health status and any underlying concerns.

Each package comprises a comprehensive diagnostic test set— from basic blood work to more advanced screenings. Based on the test results, we provide detailed health consultations, guiding patients on improving their wellness through dietary changes, lifestyle modifications, or medical intervention if necessary.

One of the hallmarks of our service is our personalized approach. We do not simply hand over test reports; we take the time to sit with each patient, explain their results in detail, and offer individualized recommendations. Suppose the diagnostics reveal any abnormalities, comorbidities, or risk factors that require further evaluation. In that case, we seamlessly refer them to relevant specialists within our trusted network, ensuring continuity of care and a smooth healthcare journey.

Our goal is to encourage proactive health management. By promoting regular screening through these customized packages, we aim to help individuals detect health issues early—often before symptoms arise—thereby improving long- term

outcomes and reducing the burden of chronic illness.

How do you see the role of private labs evolving in Sri Lanka’s healthcare system?

Private laboratories are critical and increasingly indispensable in Sri Lanka’s healthcare landscape, particularly in providing diagnostic services that support clinical decision-making and preventive care. However, effective and consistent regulatory oversight will unlock the sector’s potential and ensure quality across the board.

Sri Lanka lacks a centralized, state-appointed regulatory body that monitors and governs private diagnostic laboratories. The absence of such oversight has created a fragmented and, at times, unreliable diagnostic ecosystem. We are witnessing a rapid proliferation of small medical centers offering laboratory services, many operating without precise adherence to quality standards, modern equipment, or trained personnel. In many cases, we have encountered patients—particularly those from suburban and rural areas—who come to us after receiving inaccurate or inconsistent test results elsewhere. Such disparities undermine patient trust and can lead to misdiagnoses and inappropriate treatment.

This lack of accountability highlights the urgent need for a formal regulatory framework that sets and enforces national standards for laboratory operations, including testing protocols, equipment calibration, staff qualifications, data integrity, and record keeping. Government oversight would elevate the overall credibility and reliability of diagnostic services nationwide. Establishing a regulatory mechanism ensuring uniformity, transparency, and patient safety would benefit the healthcare sector.

Drawing comparisons to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the difference in regulatory infrastructure is striking. As an approved partner for pre-employment medical testing for GCC nations, Colombo Medilab is subject to stringent annual audits and continuous quality assessments by international medical teams. These audits examine everything from equipment functionality and maintenance to record accuracy and diagnostic precision. This regulatory rigor ensures that only medically fit individuals are permitted to live and work in those countries, thereby protecting the integrity of their public health systems.

In contrast, despite hosting many expatriate workers, Sri Lanka lacks a mechanism

to screen inbound workers medically. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) handles the medical screening for visa purposes. Well-established, high-quality local laboratories have no opportunity to contribute to this process. This restrictive model overlooks the capabilities of trusted, locally established diagnostic providers and deprives individuals of services at reasonable prices.

We strongly advocate that Sri Lanka’s Department of Immigration and Emigration adopt a model similar to that of the GCC by appointing a select group of accredited laboratories to perform mandatory health screenings of foreign nationals entering the country for employment or long-term stay. These laboratories should be regularly audited and held to the highest standards, ensuring quality and accountability.



What is your management style?

Openness, transparency, and trust are at the core. I empower my team by delegating responsibility with clarity and confidence while maintaining consistent oversight to ensure that we uphold high service standards. We expect every team

member to fulfill their role with diligence, accountability, and professionalism—principles that have guided our operations successfully for over thirty years.

While I provide close supervision to ensure alignment with our goals and standards, I also foster an environment where individuals are encouraged to take ownership of their work and grow within their roles. This balance of structured leadership and individual empowerment has been key to our long-term success and operational consistency. More importantly, I view our 22-person staff as employees and an extended family. At Colombo Medilab, we have cultivated a strong familial culture where mutual respect, collaboration, and commitment to shared values are deeply ingrained. This close-knit environment creates a sense of belonging and personal responsibility, which is critical in a service-driven sector like healthcare.

Our work involves constant interaction with patients and the public, which means our success hinges on technical competence and the strength of our people skills. That’s why we emphasize empathy, communication, and team cohesion as part of our management ethos. Everyone on our team understands the organizational vision, their roles, and the expectations placed upon them—and more importantly, they align with our mission to serve the community with care, quality, and integrity. This leadership approach has allowed us to build a resilient, reliable, and respected organization that continues to thrive in a competitive landscape.

What has sustained Colombo Medilab for so long?

I attribute Colombo Medilab’s success and longevity to one fundamental driving force: passion. Our unwavering passion for delivering ethical, reliable, and compassionate healthcare has ensured that the quality of our work remains consistent and continuously evolves to meet the changing needs of our community.

From the beginning, we have approached our work with a deep sense of commitment and personal responsibility. We are not simply running a medical facility but delivering a service that directly impacts people’s lives. This understanding drives us to uphold the highest standards of care daily, year after year.

A testament to the trust we have built is the fact that patients continue to reach out to us—even when we are away. I receive calls from patients while overseas, and I never hesitate to respond. Whether it’s offering medical advice or issuing a

prescription when they are unwell, I make it a priority to ensure they receive the support they need.

Another key factor that has sustained us is our familial culture within our team and how we interact with patients. Our staff operates as a cohesive unit, sharing a common purpose and treating each other—and our patients—with the warmth and respect typically reserved for family. This culture of care and accountability creates a welcoming, comforting environment for everyone who walks through our doors. Patients are not mere numbers to us; we recognize, remember, and care for them.

This human-centered approach has helped us expand beyond Colombo. Today, we serve patients from across the southern and central regions of Sri Lanka, many of whom travel significant distances to seek our services. Their loyalty reflects our reputation for clinical accuracy, compassionate care, and consistent service delivery.

We believe that what truly sustains an organization is not just infrastructure or technology—although those are critical— but a strong foundation built on values, integrity, and people- centered leadership. Our passion, patient trust, and the deep relationships we have nurtured over the years continue to drive our growth and relevance in an ever-evolving healthcare landscape.

At Colombo Medilab, we believe that success is best measured not only by what we achieve in business, but also by the positive impact we create in the communities we serve. As a responsible corporate citizen, we have launched and supported a range of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs focused on education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and community development.

Our initiatives have touched lives and fostered long-term growth in the regions we operate. Whether it’s supporting underprivileged students, organizing health awareness campaigns, or driving sustainability through green practices, we remain committed to making a meaningful difference, because together, we grow stronger — as a company and as a community.



Dr Junaid Iqbal Admani, General Practitioner.

How confident are you about the continuation of Colombo Medilab in the family?

The future of Colombo Medilab is in capable and committed hands. I take great pride in the fact that six doctors from the next generation of our family—including my two daughters, two nieces, and two nephews—have chosen to pursue careers in medicine, inspired by the legacy we have built. This continuity is both reassuring and motivating.

My second daughter is already actively involved in the operations of Colombo Medilab, contributing her skills and modern perspectives to help drive the organization forward. The rest of the next generation is undergoing advanced training in the United Kingdom, and they are firm in their intention to return to Sri Lanka to continue what we started. Their enthusiasm and desire to serve the people of this country give me immense confidence in the future of our institution.

Moreover, Colombo Medilab is proud to have a distinguished team of medical

professionals who have served with unwavering dedication for decades. Among them is Dr. Azyan Shafeek (MBBS, MD, MRCGP), a highly valued General Practitioner who has been part of our team since 2001. Dr. Shafeek brings expertise in pediatrics, adult medicine, pediatric nutrition, and lifestyle medicine, offering comprehensive care to patients across all age groups.

In an era when Sri Lanka is witnessing a significant outflow of medical professionals seeking opportunities abroad, I am deeply proud that our children have expressed a clear commitment to return home. Ours is not merely a business to them—it is a legacy they have grown up with. They have been in and out of Colombo Medilab from a very young age, observing firsthand the dedication, passion, and resilience that have shaped this institution into a trusted name in healthcare.

With this new generation poised to take the reins, I am confident that Colombo Medilab will continue to evolve, innovate, and lead in delivering ethical, accessible, and high- quality healthcare services to the people of Sri Lanka. Our foundation is strong, and our vision for the future is brighter than ever.



Dr Muzammil Yousuf Admani, General Practitioner.