

The Lee Jong-wook Memorial Prize for Public Health 2026

The WHO established the Dr Lee Jong-wook Memorial Prize for Public Health with support of the Korea Foundation for International Healthcare. The Prize is awarded to individuals, institutions, and/or governmental or non-governmental organizations, whose contributions to the improvement of public health should reflect the will of Dr LEE Jong-wook, the sixth WHO Director General, who dedicated his life to the underprivileged, as per the statutes and the Guidelines for the Prize. The prize aims at rewarding work that has extended far beyond the call of normal duties.¹ Professor MA Faiz, chairperson of the editorial board of the Journal of BCPS, has been recognized in 2026 for lifelong contribution to public health, particularly in addressing diseases affecting rural, poor and marginalized populations.²

The highlight of the laureate speech in the World Health Assembly 79:

“During my career, I had the opportunity to work in several areas of enormous importance for our setting, including malaria, leishmaniasis, organophosphorus compound poisoning and snakebite envenoming. It was not an easy journey: Providing service to patients, training human resources and generating scientific evidence is hard work, especially when you face resource limitations in every aspect.

With support of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the Government of Bangladesh, and that of colleagues and funders around the world, we generated evidence that changed global, regional and national strategies and protocols. For example, on the treatment of severe malaria using injectable artesunate in hospitals and rectal artesunate in communities, on single dose liposomal amphotericin to drastically reduce visceral leishmaniasis leading to the elimination of this disease as a public health

problem, and on the prevention and control of snakebite envenoming, a One Health problem and particularly neglected tropical disease: Every five minutes, one person on this planet dies from snakebite, most of these in South Asia where I live and work.

The recognition of our work is dedicated to those patients and their families. It provides us with fresh motivation to engage affected communities and continue our work to reduce suffering, death and disability among such marginalized and vulnerable people.

We worked in a team for the cause of the people who do not have voice being rural, marginalized having less education and access to diagnosis and management of their day to day conditions like snakebite, poisoning, malaria and other NTDs. Appreciation and recognition is a big boost for the control of these illnesses and being a recipient of the honor provides me a heavy responsibility to consider as an opportunity to take the cause forward.

Recognition of a condition as public health problem is much appreciated and urge the professionals and global community to be advocates on behalf of those who unfortunately either passed away or being crippled by preventable condition for example snakebite”.

The award received widespread global and local media attention.³⁻⁵ The endemic countries’ governments and the international community is expected to take this in cognizance with due attention for addressing these overlooked problems. The reflection as scientific community is, working in public health sector in resource limitation is also an opportunity for evidence generation.⁶ This award is expected to further boost the research efforts by the team and other groups, not only in Bangladesh and South Asia, but at the global level. It may attract young scientists towards pursuing a career in public health and research on tropical and infectious

diseases, and in the long run to be agents of positive change in their home countries, where they are needed most.

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Professor Brig. Gen (Retd.) Mamun Mostafi

Emeritus Professor of Nephrology, GSV Medical College and Gonoshasthaya Kendra & Editor in Chief

Journal of BCPS, Dhaka, Bangladesh,

E-mail: mamunmostafi@yahoo.com

Dr. Muhammad Abdur Rahim

Associate Professor, Department of Nephrology, BIRDEM General Hospital, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

E-mail: muradrahim23@yahoo.com

Dr. Tanveer Ahmed

Associate Professor of Plastic Surgery, National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

E-mail: tahimon@gmail.com

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