

To the Editors:

## Sleeping sickness in Sri Lanka

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The article "Sleeping sickness strikes Sri Lanka" by Saroj Jayasinghe (*CMJ* 1999; **44**: 179) should be commended for it helped me to realise how facts can be used and misused to one's advantage. S J accuses the medical teachers past and present for spending about 75 minutes to teach our medical students about trypanosomiasis from a course that extends over five years. Though trypanosomiasis is not seen in Sri Lanka, it is known to occur

widely in Africa and South America. WHO considers it as one of the five major tropical diseases in the world. How SJ calculates the student hours is very odd and is an attempt to mislead the readers. What he should have done was to calculate the total teaching time over the 25 years and then give the 10,500 hours that was spent on teaching trypanosomiasis as a percentage of the total hours. Why did he miss this simple logical method? If we

are to agree with S J, then should we spent over 90% of teaching time teaching about the common cold, headaches and chest pain, because these problems constitute the greater proportion of our practice. S J also seems to have overlooked another point. That is, who trained the medical laboratory technician to recognise the trypanosomes? It

must have been a doctor in this country who spent just one hour to learn about this dreaded illness that affects millions. Finally, we medical teachers must note that medical education is not numbers game, it needs more careful planning.

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