Professor Michael Charles Kew - Frontrunner in Hepatology

Professor Michael Charles Kew, who died in Cape Town, South Africa on the 26th of May 2021 at the age of 82 years was a leading hepatologist, and a frontrunner who did much to establish the clinical and molecular association between the hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC).

A consummate clinical and translational scientist, he spent over four decades at the forefront of research in hepatology and liver cancer. In a series of epidemiological, clinical, histological, virological and molecular studies, he and others showed that chronic infection with HBV was closely linked to liver cancer, and probably nowhere more strikingly than in sub-Saharan Africa.

Mike had an exceptional start to his academic career graduating from the University of the Witwatersrand Medical School, at the top of his class at the age of 21 years. This achievement was followed by a string of degrees including FCP(SA) in 1965, MD in 1968, PhD in 1974 and Doctor of Science (DSc) in 1982, followed by election as a Fellow of the Royal College (FRCP) in 1979.

In 1970, Mike was awarded a Wellcome Research Fellowship to work in the Liver Unit at the Royal Free Hospital, London, with the world-renowned hepatologist Dame Sheila Sherlock. Mike was regarded as a shy, but extremely knowledgeable doctor, and a formidable tennis player. This may have contributed to his making a favourable impression on Dame Sheila, who loved tennis and did not allow anyone to beat her.

He had several opportunities to leave South Africa but dedicated his life to continuing relevant research in the country. He was an inspiring mentor, training many young investigators in liver disease, and instilling in them a lifelong commitment to hepatology, several of whom have gone on to academic and research prominence.

He was the ultimate clinician, recognised by his appointment as the Personal Physician to President Nelson Mandela from 1996 to 2010 – a position he cherished.

Professor Michael Kew received a singular honour when he was appointed physician to the State President, Nelson Mandela

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