

OBITUARIES

Steve Lawn (13 March 1966 - 23 September 2016)



Prof. Steve Lawn was a 'mensch' – a compassionate doctor, a loving husband and father, a prolific researcher, a gifted teacher and an extraordinary human being. He died at the age of 50 years on 23 September 2016, from aggressive cerebral glioblastoma multiforme that he bravely battled for two years. He was Professor of Infectious Diseases and Tropical Medicine at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK, and honorary associate Professor of Infectious Diseases and HIV Medicine at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Steve Lawn was born in 1966, the youngest of three boys. He grew up in Yorkshire and won a place at the University of Nottingham to read medicine. There he met Joy, the love of his life, whom he married in December 1989. He won eight awards as an undergraduate, including the John Moir Gold Medal for the best student in general medicine. After completing his clinical training in infectious diseases in London, he engaged in tuberculosis work in 1993 in Ghana, where he researched and

taught at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi until 1997. From there, he moved to Atlanta, USA, as a Wellcome Trust Fellow to conduct laboratory-based research on the pathogenesis of HIV and tuberculosis. He returned to London in 2001, working at St George's Hospital and the Hospital for Tropical Diseases before his long-time mentor, Prof. George Griffin of St George's Hospital, introduced him to the Desmond Tutu HIV Centre in Cape Town. This resulted in Steve's heading to Cape Town with Joy and their two children Tim and Jo-Ann in 2005, as a Wellcome Trust Researcher.

Steve rapidly became an integral part of the DTHC team. To go with his lifelong passion for Africa, another passion that blossomed during the years in Cape Town was his love for running and participation in marathons. Both on the road and in front of his laptop he paced himself like a true athlete, publishing over 180 scientific articles, starting at a brisk pace of four papers in 2005 and with a particularly strong finish at almost two papers a month in the last three years. Quantity was not substituted for quality, as he won the prize at the IAS conferences of 2010 and 2012 for the highest-cited article in AIDS in those years. Besides his original studies his publishing output included several highly cited scientific reviews, demonstrating his deep grasp of his subject. This publishing output was awe-inspiring and was evidence of his legendary drive and capacity for hard work, together with his impressive intellect and a remarkable ability to focus.

Academic output was not limited to papers, for Steve was also mentor to many students and post docs. He was regularly asked to give 'state of the ART' lectures at both national and international conferences. His popularity as a speaker was in large part a result of his Yorkshire proclivity for plain

speaking, together with a mischievous sense of humour. Early in 2016 he recognised that he would have to pass on the opportunity to give an invited talk on the role of GeneXpert at the TB conference in Durban later that year, because his illness had made it impossible for him to travel. He expressed his deep sense of regret, but mischievously told us that his planned talk was going to draw parallels between the response of the San to a Coca-Cola bottle that had fallen to earth in the well-known Jamie Uys film 'The Gods must be Crazy' and the TB world's response to the GeneXpert test. We will never know the wisdom that lay in this metaphor.

Steve was much more than just an academic with a razor-sharp mind. He was very proud of his family – Joy, Jo, Tim, and an over-exuberant spaniel, Toffee. Another major part of his life was his very strong religious faith. It was this faith, combined with his family's support and a lot of Yorkshire perseverance, that helped him cope so remarkably with his devastating illness and the gruelling treatment he endured during the last two years.

Many of you will know that we, together with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the International Union against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease have initiated a trust in memory of Steve's important contributions to TB. The trust will enable memorial lectures in Cape Town and London, together with bursary support of researchers early in their careers. We hope that this will be a fitting tribute to someone who dedicated so much of his far-too-short life to the study of TB.

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