

OBITUARY

Michael Charles Kew, 12 February 1939 - 26 May 2021



Professor Mike Kew, who died in Cape Town on 26 May 2021 at the age of 82 years, was a leading hepatologist and one of the first to establish the link between hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC). Born in Johannesburg to Max and Dorothy, South African citizens of Irish descent, he was recognised as a brilliant student and graduated with first-class honours from Jeppe High School at the age of 15 years.

Mike had an enviable start to his academic career and graduated at the University of the Witwatersrand Medical School, top of his class at the age of 21 years. From this auspicious beginning he conscientiously followed William Osler's dictum that the magic words for success in medicine are 'work, sustained hard work'.

This hard work led to a string of degrees, including FCP (SA) in 1965, MD in 1968, PhD in 1974 and DSc in 1982. Academic accolades went hand in hand, and he was recognised for his achievements by induction

as a member of the Royal College of Physicians of London (MRCP) in 1971, followed by election as a Fellow of the Royal College (FRCP) in 1979. Mike's rapid acquisition of professional degrees and recognition is testament to his remarkable academic and research performance at the Johannesburg teaching hospital complex and the University of the Witwatersrand.

Mike typified the consummate clinical and translational scientist, and spent over four decades at the forefront of research in hepatology. In 1970 he 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. There he pursued investigational studies on portal hypertension and renal impairment in patients with liver cirrhosis, resulting in his first publication in *The Lancet* in 1971. Mike also co-authored with Dame Sheila a paper on the clinical spectrum of the then little understood HCC, in which he characterised the extremely aggressive, rapidly fatal African phenotype afflicting young adults. In 1981, on the first page of the first issue of *Hepatology*, Mike and David Shafritz published their seminal work entitled 'Identification of integrated hepatitis B virus DNA sequences in human hepatocellular carcinomas'.

Mike did not rest on his laurels, and continued to contribute to HBV and HCC knowledge in his research on South African and African cohorts. He documented the abysmal results of conventional chemotherapy for HCC, initiated trials of new therapies for chronic HBV infection, and documented the changing epidemiology of HBV infection and HCC. In 1990 he

was awarded a Fogarty Visiting Scientist position at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland.

He was the ultimate clinician, and this was recognised by his appointment as personal physician to President Nelson Mandela from 1996 to 2010, a position he cherished. Mike had a disciplined daily routine – up at 3.30 a.m. and off to the University, an hour for lunch, more work until 4.00 p.m., an hour or two cycling or gardening, and then to bed at 7.00 p.m. This professional routine did not prevent him excelling in other pursuits. He was a karate black belt and taught the discipline to fund his undergraduate studies. He was an accomplished tennis player and cyclist, but his passion was squash, in which he represented Transvaal as a senior player. He was also an avid reader and had a special interest in grammar, an attribute he applied to his academic writing.

After Mike's retirement, his experience was recognised by his appointment as a senior scholar in the Department of Medicine at the University of Cape Town. He was also a trustee of the Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa, where his enthusiasm remained undimmed and he offered sound advice to the fellows in training.

Our condolences go to his wife Daphne, his sons Rory and Garth, and his grandchildren Cailin and Abygael.

Sandie Thomson

Jake Krige

Wendy Spearman

Mark Sonderup

Chris Kassianides

University of Cape Town, South Africa
sandie.thomson@uct.ac.za