

## **In remembrance of Mike Kew: 1939 - 2021**

Professor Michael Charles Kew, a leading hepatologist who paved the way showing the association of the Hepatitis B virus and Hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) died on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021 at the Constantiaburg hospital in Cape Town. He was 82 years old.

Ever the consummate clinical and translational scientist, Mike spent over four decades at the forefront of research in hepatology beginning with a seminal publication in 1981, forty years ago, on the first page of the first volume of the journal Hepatology.

He graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand medical school, cum honoribus primus, and top of his class at the age of 21. This was followed with an FCP (SA) in 1965, an MD in 1968, a PhD in 1974 and Doctor of Science (DSc) in 1982 and his success in academic medicine was recognised with his induction as a member of the Royal College of Physicians of London (MRCP) in 1971, followed by his election as a Fellow of the Royal College (FRCP) in 1979. The rapid acquisition of professional degrees and recognition is a testament to his academic and research performance at the Johannesburg Teaching Hospital Complex and University of the Witwatersrand.

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.

Professor Kew's initial academic and research studies were on a broad spectrum of liver diseases including, heatstroke (a common problem in the gold mines at the time), viral hepatitis, drug-induced liver disease, portal hypertension, haemosiderosis and HCC.

Thus began a life-long commitment to the study of HCC, an extremely aggressive, rapidly fatal cancer affecting young black Southern African adults in their 20s and 30s. Living in Johannesburg at the time, many of these were gold miners from Southern Mozambique who he saw daily in the hospitals of Johannesburg.

In 1978 at the 2nd International Symposium on Viral Hepatitis, held in San Francisco Mike gave the plenary overview presentation on hepatitis B and liver cancer and which confirmed his international status. Until that time, epidemiologists, pathologists, cell biologists and clinicians were individual experts on HCC but Mike combined all of these aspects. He demonstrated a thoughtful and complete approach to the understanding of liver cancer and the role of hepatitis viruses, viral genes, host genes and environmental factors in its aetiology and pathogenesis.

In 1990 Mike was awarded a Fogarty Visiting Scientist position with Dr Robert Purcell in the Hepatitis Viruses section of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

He moved on to exploring co-factors that might alter viral carcinogenesis, defining the roles of genotypes and viral variants, the role of co-infection with hepatitis C and D viruses and viral host interactions. He also explored the potential role of chronic hepatitis B therapy as a means of decreasing the risk of HCC, and the changing epidemiology of hepatitis B and HCC

in South Africa and worldwide. In this way he succeeded in providing an overview and a balanced understanding of HCC, the most dreaded complication of viral hepatitis.

Even when retirement beckoned, his enthusiasm remained undimmed, and the value of his wisdom and experience as a senior scholar was recognised and utilised by the Department of Medicine at the University of Cape Town for many years until a few years prior to his death. He remained an active supporter of the Gastroenterology Foundation of SSA as a trustee from the time of the Foundation's inception, offering sound ethical advice and contributing to the postgraduate education of the fellows at the annual SPIER meeting.

He will be missed by the Gastro Foundation and our sincere condolences go out to this wife and family.