

Professor Emeritus the Hon Dr Manley E West, OM Remembering a Pioneer, Mentor and Friend



**Manley Elisha West
(1929–2012)**

Manley Elisha West was born in Fairy Hill, Boston, Portland on March 17, 1929. He attended Titchfield High School in Portland and later went on to study at Kingston upon Thames High School in Surrey and the University of London, England. He continued his studies at various institutions including – St Helier Hospital in Surrey, England, Cambridge University where he studied ocular pharmacology, Yale University and Sloan Kettering Institute, United States of America where he studied cancer chemotherapy, Ottawa University, Canada, where he studied experimental open-heart surgery and Belgrade University, Yugoslavia, where he studied advanced toxicology. Additionally, he was a trained accountant.

His career at the University of the West Indies began as Assistant Lecturer in Pharmacology in 1964. He was subsequently promoted to Lecturer and Internal Examiner in Pharmacology in 1968. In 1975, he served as Acting Head of the Department of Pharmacology and in that same year was appointed Head of the Department of Pharmacology, Chief Internal Examiner and Dean of the Faculty of Medical

Sciences. He was appointed Professor of Pharmacology in 1981. Professor West retired in 2010 at the age of eighty years.

Throughout his academic career, he was particularly interested in research involving medicinal herbs. This led to the development of the drugs Canasol and Asmasol from marijuana for the treatment of glaucoma and asthma, respectively. His students are all familiar with the inspiration that led to the development of Canasol. On his return from England, he bought fishing boats and the fishermen on his boats told him that fishing at nights was facilitated by the improved vision from smoking marijuana and so Professor West sought to identify the cause of this observation. For this pioneering work he was awarded the Order of Merit in 1987 from the Government of Jamaica. He was also awarded the Gold Musgrave Medal in 1994 from the Institute of Jamaica for his pioneering work in the development of Canasol.

He was awarded the FAO/United Nations/Jamaica World Food Day “Biodiversity Award” for contribution to Ophthalmic Medicine in Jamaica, The Berger Paint Award for Natural Sciences and The Centenary Medal from the Institute of Jamaica for outstanding contribution to cultural development in Jamaica in the field of Natural Science. He published many academic papers, focussed on research in diabetes, cancer, glaucoma and respiratory function.

As head of the pharmacology section, he would be at work every morning by 7:30 am and most days he would be the last one to leave. Daily, he would walk up and down the corridor, checking on every piece of equipment. Two of his most prized equipment were ‘the freeze-dryer’ (for drying extracts) and the ‘tonometer’ (for measuring eye pressure); only the chief technician had permission to handle the first and the second would only be permitted to the students who survived his rigorous training.

His major research work focussed on isolating alkaloids from plants and evaluation of their pharmacological activity. According to Dr Maxine Gossell-Williams:

“I do not know what the formula for Canasol is, as Professor West was not a man to share that secret; but, I am almost sure that there must be an alkaloid in there. I do not think I ever saw anything make his eyes open wider than the change of the ‘indicating solution’ to bright yellow and red. All his students learnt very early that isolating alkaloids was the first step to gaining his respect and then producing the crystals was definitely a ‘shoe in’ to a PhD.”

Professor West was a strong advocate for advancement through education and he provided valuable mentorship to both students and staff. He provided great council for both the young and old. One of his popular sayings was “*If you don't use it, you're going to lose it.*” Another was “*Never let your right hand know what the left hand is doing*”.

Professor West treated everyone respectfully and always found time to sit and talk with his staff members and students. He always kept crackers in his office for sharing with all who would sit with him and of course there would be an offer of a drink of tea, water or his favourite, Sancrista Cream Sherry. He was a shrewd financial accountant and

adviser. He was also a successful farmer. On Monday mornings, staff was guaranteed distribution of produce from his farm.

Professor Manley West has left a rich legacy. He will long be remembered by those who were inspired by him to “*follow your dreams, for as you dream, so shall you become*”.

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