

**Professor Sir Kenneth Lamont Stuart (June 16, 1920–November 11, 2017) –
An Appreciation**



**Professor Sir Kenneth Lamont Stuart
(1920–2017)**

It is with sadness but also a profound sense of both respect and responsibility that I pen this appreciation of one of the several senior medical academics and teachers who had a profound influence on the health of the Caribbean people as well as on my own life and career.

Professor Sir Kenneth Stuart, MB, BCh, FRCP, FRCPE, FACP, DTM, one of the small number of founding fathers of The University of the West Indies' distinguished Medical Faculty, passed away on November 11, 2017, in London, at the noble age of 97 years. He played a major role in the achievement of that distinction by the University during his tenure there from 1952 until 1976, when he was appointed Medical Adviser to the Commonwealth Secretariat. His passing

represents the end of an era, as he was the last of the foundation teachers of the University, which has led the transformation of healthcare in the Caribbean.

Kenneth Lamont Stuart was born on June 16, 1920, into a deeply religious home in Bank Hall, Barbados. He learnt his three Rs at the famous Wesley Hall Boys' School under the legendary Charles F Broome, and proceeded to Harrison College. There, he was part of that sixth form galaxy that included Sir Roy Marshall, Sir Carlisle Burton, Sir James Tudor and National Hero the Right Excellent Errol Walton Barrow. He played cricket and football, of course, but his great physique was acquired by swimming for miles off Brighton Beach, in the company of Sir Carlisle. And it has no doubt been the combination of great genes and an extremely active and healthy lifestyle that enabled him to long outlive these other brilliant contemporaries.

He won the Barbados Scholarship of 1940 in classics. After obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree at McGill University in classics and philosophy, he went on to study medicine in Belfast, Northern Ireland, paving the way for other great classical scholars such as Sir George Alleyne (MBBS, The University of the West Indies), Dr Richie Haynes and Dr Oscar Jordan (both graduates of The University of Edinburgh) to transmutate from arts to science. He graduated in 1948, having been awarded the Coulter Scholarship for Clinical Medicine and Surgery and wasted no time in gaining a diploma in Tropical Medicine and the Royal College Memberships. After several attachments to hospitals in Britain, Sir Ken returned to the Caribbean in 'two twos' – four years to be exact – as Senior Registrar at the newly opened University College Hospital of the West Indies in Jamaica, in 1952. A year later, he became Lecturer in Medicine and was promoted at great speed (Senior Lecturer in Medicine, 1958–62; Reader in Medicine, 1962–66; Professor of Medicine, 1966–78; Dean, Medical Faculty, 1969–71; and Head of the Department of Medicine, 1972–76), becoming the first West Indian Professor of Medicine in 1966.

His career as researcher, teacher and international consultant can be divided, like Gaul, into three parts. The first is the glorious early period of what began as the University College of the West Indies, established as a college of the University of London. These were the founding years, from 1948 when the first 33 medical students entered the Mona Campus in the serendipitously available Gibraltar Refugee Camp at the old Mona Sugar Estate near Kingston, Jamaica, in 1948, and the opening of the University Hospital of the West Indies in 1952, until the beginning of the expansion plans for the Medical Faculty in 1966.

Sir Ken relished the challenge of blazing a trail and the wealth of research to be done in a country with poor colonial health services, widespread poverty and a range of diseases that he would never have encountered during training in Belfast or in his postgraduate years in Britain.

Like a medical King Midas, everything he touched turned to gold. First came the description, with G Bras and DB Jelliffe, of veno-occlusive disease of the liver (or VOD), an aggressive liver disease killing Jamaican children. It was caused by a popular bush tea made from the herb *crotalaria retusa* – one of the many popular cure-alls of our grandmothers, who had no idea how toxic it was! But granny's bush teas were supposed to be good for you ... and still believed in by some, with childlike faith.

This was followed by the discovery of a toxin, hypoglycine A, in the UNRIPE Jamaican ackee, cause of the feared vomiting sickness. The Jamaican ackee, which originally came from West Africa, is a staple in Jamaica, but no one knew that there was a toxin in the unripe ackee which broke down once the ackee was ripe and the outer shell opened up. Many children who were poorly nourished were very susceptible to this toxin and were admitted to hospital seriously ill – with very low blood sugar. Sir Ken told how Lady Standard, then Sister Francis, arranged a special bedroom on the paediatric ward for him, so he could do emergency liver biopsies on these babies, at any hour of night.

After these problems were solved, a Ministry of Health education unit was set up to educate the public about these two dreaded diseases. There is no better demonstration in the world of the impact of research on public health, of the benefits of health education, and of successful partnership between medical researchers and Ministry of Health.

The next 10 years saw a steady flow of some 50 papers on malnutrition, rheumatic fever, cardiomyopathies and high blood pressure, with the development of a

hypertension special clinic at the University Hospital of the West Indies, and Sir Ken's recognition on the world scene. He criss-crossed the globe with the medical jet set. I remember an issue of the medical student magazine, *The Stethoscope*, then edited by two of my colleagues and myself, which reported under News: 'Professor Ken Stuart visited the Department of Medicine this month'. He took it in good spirit, because he really enjoyed the students and he loved teaching.

The second part of his career combined that international reputation abroad with his role at Mona, as Dean of the Medical Faculty and Head of the Department of Medicine. He promoted the development of medical teaching in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, and led the development of our own postgraduate programmes, in response to a group of us (calling ourselves the Action Group) who protested the continuing need for West Indians to emigrate to North America for specialty training. Abroad, he was made a member of the World Health Organization Expert Panel on Cardiovascular Disorders, Consultant to the Pan American Health Organization, Chairman of their Committee for Control of Hypertension, Honorary Lecturer at Harvard University and soon became a member of the Board of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

And so in 1976, it was a natural step for him to move fully on to the world stage, and into the third phase of his career, first as Medical Adviser to the Commonwealth Secretariat and then Consultant Adviser to the Wellcome Trust, Britain, Chairman of the Court of Governors of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, member of the Board of Governors of the International Development Research Centre, Canada, member of the Council of Governors of Guy's, King's and St Thomas' Hospitals Medical School, London, Honorary Lecturer in Medicine at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School and Hospital in London, Honorary Medical and Scientific Adviser to the Barbados High Commission, Chairman of the Caribbean Health Research Council, Consultant to the World Bank, member of the Academic Board of St George's University, Grenada, and a member of the Board of Directors of the UK Trust for the Windward Islands Research and Education Foundation (WINDREF). He was also a patron of Doctors for Human Rights and trustee of London Lighthouse, a Founder Trustee of Restless Development (a youth-orientated organization which mobilized young people to volunteer across the globe), an advisor to the Liverpool Slave Museum, and the prestigious Gresham Professor

of Physic (1988–92), to name just some of his many important roles.

He was never shy to act as an opinion leader in matters of conscience. For example, in a letter to *The Independent* in 1996, he called for a national council to respond to emerging medical issues, issues that could not be left entirely to doctors, scientists and lawyers: ‘It is time that society gave serious attention to the processes (other than the current “fire-alarm” approaches) by which such questions might be dealt with in the future. There is clearly a need for some form of National Ethical Council with a wide-ranging membership, whose role would not only be to review the issues that stemmed or seemed likely to stem from medical scientific advance, but also to promote community understanding and discussion of them.’

He was knighted by Her Majesty the Queen in 1977 for services to medicine in the Caribbean and the Commonwealth. In 1986, he received an Honorary Doctorate of Science from his alma mater, Queen’s University in Belfast. But he never lost his love for his Barbados, and his roots. He invested in an alternate home in Paynes Bay and had a share in the Discovery Bay Hotel, while his interest in tourism was elegantly expressed by his mother, the owner and proprietress of the Blue Caribbean on the corner of St Lawrence Gap.

Sir Ken’s secret of success had been his canny ability to convert thought into action and action into words. Many an academic career has foundered at the mere thought of action or at the effort of writing well. Many have the urge to write but lie down until the urge passes. Sir Ken had taken to heart the lines of both the English poet WH Auden and the Elizabethan poet Francis Bacon. Auden wrote:

*Those who will not reason perish in the act –
Those who will not act perish for that reason.*

Bacon wrote:

*Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man,
and writing an exact man.*

These are the marks of scholarship, which Sir Ken mastered in full measure, and the third phase of his work continued at the same pace as during his main academic career. He re-wrote the fundamental messages of health promotion, which he took to heart himself and which gave him the gift of eternal youth. He took his many messages to all corners of the globe – and although

quintessentially Barbadian, he became very much a citizen of Planet Earth, crossing oceans more easily than most of us can find our way to Boscobel.

He was one of the world leaders in the field of hypertension, and although I did not anticipate it at the time, his inspiration in understanding and managing hypertension was to play a major part in the development of my own medical specialty and career. As a clinical pharmacologist, I recognised the huge problem of hypertension in the Caribbean and the challenges to control it, leading ultimately to the founding of the now renamed George Alleyne Chronic Disease Research Centre. Indeed, he was instrumental, through his role with King’s College in London, in helping the Chronic Disease Research Centre to obtain a major research grant to study the primary care approach to managing hypertension and diabetes in the Caribbean. And so it was a great privilege to present him for an Honorary Doctorate of Science from our University in 1999. Here is how I began my citation then:

Chancellor, I present Sir Kenneth Stuart, Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Science (honoris causa) of Queen’s University, Belfast, Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and of London, Fellow of the American College of Physicians, Fellow of the Faculty of Public Health Medicine, Fellow of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine ... He SURELY is a jolly good Fellow! He receives fellowships the way other men get haircuts.

And I concluded with the traditional request to the Chancellor ‘...to receive a distinguished doctor, a celebrated scholar, a renowned researcher, a Brighton boy, a Bajan Bard and Caribbean luminary, a light out of the West, and to confer on Kenneth Lamont Stuart the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa.’

Sir Ken continued his many activities – academic, consulting and even tennis well into the last decade of his life. The passing of this illustrious Bajan, West Indian and Citizen of the World at the glorious age of 97 years is testament to a life of extraordinary energy and passion – physical strength and activity combined with mental creativity of the highest order. The sympathy of his thousands of colleagues and former students goes out to his wife Barbara, Lady Stuart, and his three brilliant children – Andrea, Steven and Lynda. Andrea is a writer and cultural historian (author of historical best-sellers *The Rose of Martinique* and *Sugar in the Blood*), Steven is a software engineer at Harvard University and

Lynda (MD, PhD), Deputy Director of the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation.

Sir Ken and Barbara, Lady Stuart (née Ashby), were introduced to each other by Sir Carlisle Burton while Sir Ken was on holiday in Barbados from Jamaica in the 1950s, and after a long-distance relationship, they married on May 11, 1958.

Andrea shared with me a delightful story of Sir Ken:

Many years ago, he met a man whose last name was Flynn. My dad immediately said, 'Ah I know that name.' The man sighed and said, 'you probably have heard of my son Errol Flynn, the film actor.' My dad replied, 'No. But I do know an illustrious biochemist of that name.' The man put his arm around him and said, 'That is the first time anyone recognised my name rather than that of my son.' The pair remained friends for many years.

Andrea also told the story that Sir Ken had been invited to the House of Lords, where he sat beside a group of pompous men trying to remember the Latin for some phrase. Eventually, he put them out of their misery and completed the phrase impeccably – gaining the awe of the room and a new friend, the now late Lord Soulsby, a British microbiologist and life peer. And in Andrea's words:

I could always count on Dad, no matter what scrapes I got into. I would turn up in his glorious office in Pall Mall and he would make everything right. For me, no man was his equal.

May he rest in peace.

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