

Tribute to Professor Owen Morgan

April 26, 1939–October 07, 2020



Consultants of the Department of Medicine, Mona, the University of the West Indies. Professor Morgan, sitting, 1st right.

I am sure that there are numerous patients who can speak feelingly and gratefully about him as a good physician. Likewise, there are many students and young physicians who attest to his careful mentoring and those who saw and interacted with him as Professor and Head of the Department of Medicine and as the Dean of the Faculty might refer approvingly to his attention to detail, his careful preparation, his balanced opinion, his deliberate manner and clear speech. His election to Fellowship of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of London, Edinburgh and Ireland and the Mastership of the American College

of Physicians all speak to his standing and distinction internationally as a physician.

But I will always remember my friend Owen Morgan with great fondness and admiration, because in addition to the qualities and laurels above about which there can be no debate, in my book he was one of nature's finest gentlemen. I thought of Charles Dickens' quotation from his *Old Curiosity Shop* as I described Owen in my autobiography. As Dickens wrote, 'The word of a gentleman is as good as his bond: sometimes better'. Owen St. Clair Morgan never had to post a bond with me, he would just give me his word.

I met him in the late 1970s when he had just returned from Ireland to join the Department of Medicine and Prof. Eric Cruickshank suggested that he come to see me and show me his MD thesis which was on 'The Iron Binding Proteins in Human Gastric Juice'. We discussed it—it was very good, and we went on to discuss medicine in general, the prospects of carrying on that line of research and what he thought his role might be here. I was impressed by the clarity of his thought, the seriousness of his demeanor, and his conviction that he had come back home to stay. He was putting down his bucket in Jamaica, in the University of the West Indies and he never wavered from that posture.

He was an ideal medical colleague whom I got to know well when I joined the Department of Medicine of which he was a member, and even better when I became Head. We found similarity in our upbringings as children of rather strict schoolteachers who had inculcated into us habits such as punctuality. He could always be counted on for sage advice and support and for willingly sharing the administrative duties which devolve on senior members of any department in a university. On several occasions, by word or deed, he would show that his loyalty to medicine and the transmission of its ideals were not just the latest in a palimpsest of postures but were truly foundational to his practice of the profession. Of course, we would have differences of opinion on occasion, but the dialectic would produce a synthesis

that was almost inevitably to the benefit of the students, the Department or the Faculty.

He was a doctor's doctor—methodical, empathetic, compassionate, always seemingly unhurried in his dealing with the individual patient. I could offer no higher compliment than that I asked him to see a close member of my family as a patient. I still have his letter to me describing in meticulous detail his opinion and prognosis which proved to be a hundred percent accurate. He participated in the groundbreaking research on the relationship of the human T-cell lymphotropic virus to a neurological disease in Jamaica and never failed to admonish his mentees that academics in any discipline had responsibilities for teaching, service and research. His own academic career was testament that he practiced what he preached.

His emails to me in his last days showed that he faced his diagnosis with equanimity but with the concern for others that was one of his hallmarks. Those of us who got to know him and mourn his death must surely reflect that we are the better for having known him. I offered my condolences to his wife, Paulette and hope that in the dark days she and the family will take some small comfort from knowing how many of his friends like myself thought so highly of this fine gentleman.

George Alleyne
October 25, 2020