

# Tributes from the Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa

## C KASSIANIDES

*Chairman and Founder, Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa*

From the moment I came into contact with Professor Michael Kew, on an early morning ward round, as they always were, in the 5th year of medical school, it suddenly became very clear. You wanted to be part of it all – the clarity, the thought, the discipline, the skill, the attention, the dedication, the brilliance and most of all, the humour. It was serious and it was clever and it simply looked so easy. Hepatology was interesting, but it was Mike Kew who made it alluring.

Not long after joining the Liver Unit, I arrived at work one morning to find a note attached to the door of my office asking me to see him. I hurried to Mike's office, and before I was seated he looked up and asked me if I wanted to join Jay Hoofnagle's liver unit at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland – if so, I had a couple of months to get there. Blushing, I replied that I would love to go but I had a wedding planned. Excellent, he replied, that gives you enough time to get married in a few weeks before you leave.

A project to accompany me to the NIH quickly came to his mind – go and find out about the duck hepatitis B virus, it's a good model to pursue. Ducks! I never knew the hepatitis B virus existed in ducks. Soon I found myself with Mike, driving to a duck farm, at an unearthly hour of the morning. There, we stood together, white coats, gloved with outstretched hands, holding onto vials attempting to catch every drop of blood from every slaughtered duck. At the NIH, the duck model became a useful one for the screening of antiviral agents directed against the hepatitis B virus.

Many years later, I returned to South Africa, and despite not joining the Liver Unit we remained in close contact. He embraced the establishment of the Gastroenterology Foundation 10 years ago with great enthusiasm, and he has been a consistent source of moral and intellectual support – a man you can rely on, a true trustee, my ethics tsar.

## J E J KRIGE

*Emeritus Professor of Surgery, University of Cape Town, Hepatopancreatobiliary Unit, Groote Schuur Hospital; Founding Trustee of the Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa*

The footprints a scientist leaves are immortalised and preserved in perpetuity on the pages of journals and books, and, in rare circumstances, are amplified by devotees who follow in the footsteps of the master. In hepatology, Mike Kew's universal footprint, and those of his disciples, encompasses the globe. In a stellar career extending over four decades, Mike has made seminal contributions to academic medicine in terms of clinical excellence, scientific discovery, leadership and mentorship, and deservedly earned recognition and accolades as a doyen of hepatology worldwide. Many attest to his exceptional mentorship skills, and highlight how he influenced the development of hepatology at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) over the decades, and built an outstanding department, at both clinical and research levels. Mike's considerable contribution to hepatology can be gauged by the quality and number of his publications, his international recognition and the accolades he has received. Prominent among his achievements has been Mike's supervision and training of postgraduate students who obtained doctorates. His remarkable creativity, prodigious work ethic and strategic vision will be greatly missed by those who have been privileged to work with him.

I first encountered Mike when, as a receptive medical student, I attended an MRC Liver Research Centre Symposium in Cape Town organised by John Terblanche and Ralph Kirsch, where Mike was a guest lecturer. I remember his clear and lucid presentation on hepatocellular carcinoma with vivid clarity. I was equally impressed by his reputation as a sportsman, when we discovered that he had a black belt in karate, played competitive squash and cycled, proficiencies that gave him a glowing patina of youthful vigour and vitality. To an impressionable medical student, these accomplishments, the

successful marriage of academia and sport, represented the very pinnacle of professional achievement, something one could aspire to, but never quite match. It was therefore a special privilege to invite him, years later, to be a co-investigator and author when I published an analysis of liver resections performed in Cape Town for hepatocellular carcinoma.

I next met Mike in Cairo when we were both on the faculty of a Liver Congress in Egypt. After the academic sessions concluded, I recall the pleasure we had, interposed with fright, when riding rather obnoxious and cantankerous camels around the Great Pyramids of Giza, drinking wickedly potent Arabian coffee in the El Khalili market, haggling with unctuously persuasive cotton merchants at the Bab al-Badistan souk, and later in the evening, admiring the acrobatic prowess and silky skills of the scantily covered and amply contoured belly dancers during the postprandial entertainment offered by the hosts at the congress dinner on a boat on the Nile.

Our paths crossed again when Mike retired from Wits and joined the Department of Medicine at the University of Cape Town as an honorary consultant. We were both trustees of the Gastroenterology (GI) Foundation of SA (the Gastro Foundation), and he became an integral member of the faculty for the GI fellows boot camp weekend held every January at Spier. We identified the fact that an important component of the education and development of aspiring young academics was the ability to write and speak well. The Gastro Foundation regarded this as a fundamental and core component of the education strategy and boot camp curriculum for fellows. Not only is this ability crucial for career progression, it is also a satisfying and fulfilling experience, and a rewarding achievement, to present the results of personal research. Who better to learn from than the

master, so when organising the academic programme, it was a pleasure to invite Mike to talk to the fellows on 'How to write'. I remember in detail his clear instructions, clever aphorisms and the 'Kewisms' in his talk. He said, 'Good writing is a craft, not an art,' and that revision was the essence of 'getting the words right' and was inseparable from good writing. He stressed that the secret of revising a manuscript was to marshal one's thoughts in the right order, to get rid of 'clutter,' and to perfect and streamline the prose. Make what you have written accurate, precise and readable, was Mike's editorial injunction to lesser mortals and novice authors. A favorite Kewism was 'Write in haste and revise at leisure'. He emphasised that the initial sentences were important, and should invite and persuade the reader to read on. These pearls of writing wisdom from an erudite and master wordsmith were doubly appreciated, by both fellows and faculty.

Many of us set out, like Odysseus returning from Troy, on quests, either real or representative, and embark, sometimes indifferently and without a compass, on life's unrelenting voyage of self-discovery. As the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy, inspired by the Homeric return journey in the *Odyssey*, wrote in 'Ithaca': 'When you set out on

your journey to Ithaca, pray that the road is long, full of adventure, full of knowledge.' Going on a lengthy journey (and embarking on a career) is as much about the process as the destination, and involves unexpected surprises, challenges, setbacks and rewards. Mike's journey has been one of Homeric proportions and achievements, and, driven by a sense of purpose in life, he has demonstrated that the thirst for knowledge does not abate or lessen with advancing age.

The tributes in this festschrift are testimony to the many achievements of a remarkable man and his stellar career, and are an opportunity to reflect on the life and work of a legend, who has embodied the highest values of medicine. We pay tribute to a man of quiet dignity and towering achievements whose accomplishments, cerebral attention to detail and steadfast belief in work and industry show how one person can make a difference in the lives of many. Mike has demonstrated that an academic life can be richly rewarding and satisfying, and that he has led a life that can be described only in superlatives – as a person, doctor, clinician, researcher and scientist, and teacher. We wish you well in your ultimate retirement. *Hambakahle, Mike.*

## R ALLY

*Professor of Gastroenterology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg;  
Founding Trustee of the Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa*

I came to know Professor Kew in 1978, when I was a fifth-year medical student in his unit at the then NEH (Non-European Hospital). NEH was regarded as *the* training academic medical facility, the heads being Professors Kew, Seftel and Joffe. Professor Kew was the Dora Dart Professor in Medicine, and in 1994 became the Honorary Director of the South African Medical Research Council at the University of the Witwatersrand.

My first case presentation to him caused absolute fear, as he told me to stop playing the xylophone instead of percussing the chest! With time, however, this fear led to total admiration, as he taught us medicine and inspired us to become not only good and insightful doctors, but to be caring and compassionate human beings.

Later, our interactions were much more 'amicable' as he did ward rounds at the Liver Clinic at Baragwanath Hospital. The memory I have of him at that time was this amazing doctor looking for patients with liver cancer, who always had a liver biopsy needle in his white coat pocket!

Professor Kew was not only a doctor and scientist; he was in great physical shape, playing squash, running and cycling. He was as fearsome on the squash court as he was on his ward rounds! Prof. Kew educated and inspired me. Even though I am not a hepatologist, it is because of my association with him that I appreciate the immense importance of this organ.

## J RAMOS

*Adjunct Professor of Surgery, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg;  
Founding Trustee of the Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa*

I first remember Professor Kew when I was a medical student at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in the early 1980s. To us students, he seemed a distant figure, one of the many professors we encountered and heard about. It was only as an intern and then surgical registrar that I began to have a better appreciation of who he was and what he did. The latter was somewhat esoteric, as we really had no idea of what the field of hepatology was all about ... I recall him doing rounds, leading a posse of consultants and students who all stood in awe of him. We were all acutely aware, however, that whenever we had a difficult hepatology problem in the surgical ward, he was the undisputed expert. As a consultant in Professor Myburgh's unit, I was able to better appreciate his brilliance in his field and his work ethic.

Professor Kew epitomised the superb clinician-scientists that we were graced with at Wits in the 70s, 80s and 90s. He, together with

Professors Myburgh, Bothwell, Barlow and many others, was one of the true greats, able to combine intelligence, knowledge, experience and clinical acumen to solve the complex clinical problems that they were presented with. This, in an era when investigations that today we take for granted were not yet available. They were leaders who educated a generation of doctors and allowed them to achieve greatness.

As a trustee of the Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa, I was able to interact with Professor Kew on other levels, and my admiration and respect for him grew even greater. He is a true scientist, with vast knowledge and expertise. Despite this, he is warm and humble, always prepared to advise and contribute. We have all been enriched by this special person, and pay our tribute to him with this celebration of his academic achievements.

**S R THOMSON**

*Emeritus Professor of Gastroenterology, University of Cape Town; Trustee of the Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa*

In my 21 years in the Department of Surgery at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, I knew of Mike by his reputation as a leading researcher into the scourge of the hepatitis B virus on the African continent. In those years, I had interacted with him only briefly at congresses where liver resection was also on the agenda. Over the last 6 years, however, our professional relationship has grown. I would like to relate three personal encounters during this time that attest to the attributes of this truly remarkable man.

The first encounter was at the Gastro Foundation (Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa) Fellows Weekend, at Spier. During that weekend, we indulged in team-building activities. One of the games we played as part of these exercises was croquet. I was the 'expert', and had to educate the fellows and faculty on the rules and the finer points of strategy. My most avid pupil was Mike, who mastered the strategy and led his team to victory.

My next encounter was after he had migrated as an honorary professor to the Department of Medicine at the University of Cape

Town (UCT). I had just taken up the chair of gastroenterology at UCT, in 2011, and he approached me walking down the main hospital corridor. His build was that of a wiry Scotsman, his demeanour unassuming and his friendliness natural and engaging. He started the conversation by telling me that he really enjoyed my presentation to the faculty at the time of the selection process, and that they had chosen the right man to succeed in the job. This was just the fillip I required to dust myself down from what had been a very harrowing transition time in my academic career, and get on with my new job.

My third encounter was when I went to visit him in hospital after his bicycle accident. I was somewhat apprehensive as to how the interaction might go, given the seriousness of his injury. I am pleased to report that my fears were unfounded. Bruised, battered yet entirely lucid, his first words to me were, 'It so kind of you to come and visit me.'

Mike was and is a fast learner, a leader, a mentor, an academic par excellence and a gentleman.