



IN MEMORIAM

Asher Dubb



January 2005 marked the beginning of a new year but also the end of an era. Professor Asher Dubb died, sadly, on this day at the age of 76 after fighting a courageous battle with lung cancer for the better part of a year. His gradual deterioration allowed him and his family to come to terms with his illness and to prepare for the inevitable end in the best possible way. He died in peace and

with dignity.

Asher Dubb was born in Somerset East in 1928. After completing his schooling at Grey High School in Port Elizabeth he studied medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand, graduating MB BCh in 1950. Internship at Baragwanath Hospital was followed by a stint at Waterval Hospital, first as a Medical Officer and then as Clinical Head and Superintendent. He pursued further training as a Medical Registrar at Coronation Hospital, qualifying as a physician in 1960. He took up the position of physician at Baragwanath Hospital shortly thereafter and moved through the ranks to that of Principal Physician in 1974. The University of the Witwatersrand awarded him an Associate Professorship in 1980 in recognition of his many scholarly contributions. He was the first recipient of the PV Tobias Medal for Excellence in Clinical Teaching in 1982, and was also awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the College of Physicians of South Africa for his outstanding contributions to medicine in South Africa. The Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand recognised his outstanding service in the form of a 75th Anniversary Medal.

Asher retired officially in 1993, after rendering more than 40 years of dedicated service to Baragwanath (now Chris Hani Baragwanath) Hospital. He continued to serve and teach thereafter in the capacity of Emeritus Professor of Medicine until he fell ill early in 2004.

I have known Asher Dubb for just on 30 years, a relationship which grew and matured from early on when he was teacher and mentor and I the student and recipient of his wisdom, to more recent times, when we worked together as colleagues and developed a lasting friendship.

Asher was a doyen of clinical teaching in South Africa. His reputation was built up over decades, and generations of medical students were the beneficiaries. Who can forget those inspiring bedside rounds, his courteous approach to patients, his almost obsessive attention to detail, his encyclopaedic knowledge of medicine, and his amazing deductive powers. And that's not all. We were also treated to the history behind the disease – which was storytelling at its best. A recent editorial in one of the world's leading medical journals bemoaned the shortage of role models in the clinical teaching arena at present – weren't we fortunate in having Asher!

The dictionary defines the word mentor as a wise or trusted advisor or guide. Asher performed this role countless times during his career. He was always available to be a sounding board, an advisor, a confidante. He was interested in his students, many of whom kept contact with him whether in South Africa or overseas. A measure of the high esteem in which Asher was held by his former students was the wonderful turnout by many of them who came from far and wide to be at his retirement party. It was a wonderful occasion.

As an intern at Bara in the early 1970s I had the double benefit of being exposed to Asher's expert training as well as listening to his talks on medical history. These were beautifully illustrated with pictures of stamps depicting famous medical men and women. Unlike the rather dry chapters that characterise many of the medical history texts, Asher was able to weave historical fact into the narrative which was much more enjoyable. This hobby grew into a series of talks and articles that have entertained many audiences locally and abroad.

This year marks the centenary of Anton Chekhov's death – Russia's most famous physician. His remarkable life was devoted to medicine and consumed by literature. In a letter to a friend, he wrote, 'Medicine is my lawful wife, and literature is my mistress. When I get fed up with one, I spend the night with the other. Though it is irregular, it is less boring this way, and besides, neither of them loses anything through my infidelity.' When I read this it reminded me of Asher and his two passions, for medicine and for literature.

But of course, Asher's major devotion was to his wife, Vivian. They had a wonderful friendship and marriage (31 years) which enriched their lives immensely. They were a grand couple.

Asher will be sorely missed by his wife, Vivian, his son Myron, his daughter Sharon, his grandchildren, and by the many friends and associates whose lives he touched.

Ken R L Huddle