

# Professor Roy D. Mugerwa

Remembered by Professor Francis Omaswa with contributions from Professors Harriet Mayanja and Moses Joloba

Professor Roy Deogratius Mugerwa, born 2 January 1942 and passed on 19 April 2019, is one of the unsung heroes of the health sector and an academic giant of Makerere University Medical School. He was one of the patriotic Ugandans who had opportunities to go and work abroad during very hard times in Uganda's history but decided on several occasions to return to serve Ugandans after completing higher training abroad. He contributed significantly to the establishment of the Uganda Heart Institute and served as Deputy Director to me and later became Director when I moved to the Ministry of Health as Director General of Health Services. He initiated echocardiography in Uganda and the first specialised hypertension clinic. He founded and was first Chair of the Uganda Heart Society and I was the Secretary. When the HIV pandemic was raging in the country and the African continent he shifted his focus and energy to the fight against it without abandoning cardiology and hypertension. He coordinated the initial studies on HIV vaccines and treatment modalities and also led several research international teams on the management of TB.

Professor Roy Mugerwa was an accomplished internist and cardiologist and Head of the Department of Medicine at Mulago Hospital as well as a scholar and researcher at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. He trained in medicine and cardiology at Mulago Hospital and the UK, Netherlands and US. He was a founding member of the Uganda-CWRU Research Collaboration which was established in 1988 to meet the enormous challenges of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. In 1990 he became the lead Principal Investigator for the Collaboration, a leadership role he continued for the next 20 years.

His leadership for the Collaboration resulted in the completion of multiple successful research projects and clinical trials funded by the US National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, among others. His leadership was pivotal to the successful studies completed for TB preventive therapy and improved TB treatment for persons living with HIV, and additional HIV-related studies.

With Peter Mugenyi and colleagues from the Joint Clinical Research Centre, he organised and completed the first HIV preventive vaccine trial in Africa. Through the Uganda - Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) Fogarty training programme, Roy Mugerwa as a Uganda Co-PI, over 100 Ugandans were trained at CWRU and



locally at Doctoral, Masters level and others undertook short courses. Many of the trainees took leadership positions in Makerere and other Universities, Ministry of Health and other sectors. They have gone to train others and significantly contribute to the reduction of the epidemic. The collaboration has continued to expand beyond HIV/AIDS and had been a model for others.

Roy Mugerwa was a cardiologist that assumed the mantle of leadership when HIV/AIDS emerged and led to surges in TB-HIV co-infection. His brilliance, quiet dignity, honesty and elegance were broadly respected and admired. He advanced the careers of those that succeeded him and hold leadership roles at Makerere University, including Harriet-Mayanja-Kizza, Moses Joloba, and Moses Kanya. When the HIV/AIDS vaccine trial became a political issue he was the person that could meet with the Ministers and make it happen. He was unflagging in his support of the Uganda-CWRU Research Collaboration and was essential to its recognition as an effective force in the global response to HIV/AIDS and TB.

Roy Mugerwa's vision to conduct relevant and integrated research, capacity building and to improve the quality of life of patients through training and care remains the mantra of the Collaboration to this day. He provided the early leadership and direction that was essential to its success and sustainability. He is missed.

His interests were broad including AIDS, hypertension, endomyocardial fibrosis and tuberculosis. He published widely and prolifically in scientific journals, wrote chapters in books and was a popular key note speaker in international meeting round the world.

I knew him well at personal level having studied side by side with him from our secondary school days at St Mary's College Kisubi in Uganda to Makerere Medical School pursuing undergraduate and Master's Degrees in the same class and teaming up to launch the Uganda Heart Institute and the Uganda Heart Association. On the Makerere hill we lived for five years in neighbouring rooms in Mitchel Hall, socialised and studied together, and several times during holidays he visited at my parents' home in Mukura, Ngora district, Uganda. Roy was a high academic achiever and led our school class for all the six secondary school years at Kisubi. He was a jovial fun filled person who got on well with all manner of people.

He was married to Rosemary Kibulo Mugerwa, deceased physical therapist, and had 11 children, a number of whom are in the medical profession.

The world is so much the better for the life of Roy Deogratius Mugerwa. His legacy remains a beacon to generations of scientists in Uganda, Africa and world.

Francis Omaswa, CEO of ACHEST, Kampala; founding Executive Director Global Health Workforce alliance, and Publisher of Africa Health



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