

# Prof Rachel Nandawula Musoke, Neonatologist, Associate Professor of Paediatrics and Child Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Nairobi, 1944-2022

Colleagues of the late Prof Musoke give an account of a life well lived.



We are saddened by the sudden death of Prof Rachel Musoke so soon after her retirement and relocation back to Uganda. She will be remembered for her distinctive contribution to African Neonatal Practice, breastfeeding, child nutrition, hospital care of sick newborn, and treatment and care of children infected and affected by HIV. Prof Musoke was faculty at University of Nairobi for 43 years (1977-2020) and for most of that time Head of Neonatology at the Kenyatta National Hospital. She was a highly respected doctor, teacher, mentor and colleague in the two institutions.

Prof Musoke's contribution to science and Practice of Medicine

**Rachel was an active academic.** Her first publication was in 1968 in the East African medical Journal, and the most recent just 6 days before she rested. She had 124 publications listed in Research Gate, 16 of them as first author, 15 book chapters and contribution to many training manuals and care guidelines. Her contribution to breastfeeding is vast and supported integration of important strategies for survival of the newborns, training on lactation, consulting on many government and NGO forums to develop

policies and guidelines that are used widely in our region and beyond.

In 1990 she published a ground-breaking paper demonstrating that it is possible to exclusively feed low birth weight infants on mother's own milk and achieve adequate weight gain and the babies had fewer infections, especially gastrointestinal and respiratory infections. In the same paper she demonstrated that it is possible to sustain lactation through manual expression during the period that the mother is not nursing her infant directly on the breast and that cup rather than bottle feeding protected babies from suffering nipple confusion and so mothers were able to continue breastfeeding after discharge from the hospital, providing the best chance for survival.<sup>1</sup> This work immortalized by the UNICEF video on feeding the low birth weight infant paved the way to a public health approach in upscaling the use of expressed breastmilk for all categories of at-risk infants and enabled legislation to protect breastfeeding for the newborn baby. [1RN Musoke. Breastfeeding promotion: Feeding the low birth weight infant. *Int J Gynecol Obstet* 1990; 31 (suppl 1) 56]. On the day she passed on there was a whole page feature in a leading local newspaper in Kenya celebrating her contribution to introduction

and scale-up of Kangaroo Care for very low birth weight infants in Kenya a cost effective, affordable method of ensuring low birth weight infants survive and thrive in very limited resource settings. Her contribution into the Kenya Ministry of health Clinical Practice manuals on care of the preterm and sick babies for different levels of healthcare settings and which at the Kenyatta National Hospital, is referred to as the Prof Musoke guideline will be an enduring legacy.

### **Prof Rachel Musoke as an Educator -**

Prof taught 42 cohorts of undergraduate and postgraduate doctors and mentored as many cohorts of nursing students doing their attachment in the Kenyatta National hospital Newborn Unit. She supervised 89 Master's degree in Paediatrics and Child Health (MMED) dissertations at the University of Nairobi, a number were published in peer reviewed journals and others informed health policy in Kenya. Her students have learned and more students continue to learn from textbooks that she contributed into substantively such as the African Textbook of Clinical Psychiatry and Mental Health ed. D.M. Ndeti AMREF 2006, and the Primary Health Care Manual, a text developed and used in five University Department of Paediatrics in the East and

Southern Africa region.

#### Development of Newborn care services

For many years, the name Prof Musoke was synonymous with the Kenyatta National Hospital Neonatal Unit. She led the development of neonatology syllabi for medical doctors at undergraduate, post-graduate, and Fellowship level as well as post-basic training in neonatal nursing. She sought out opportunities for further training for her mentees in overseas institutions and to come back and set up/improve the services. Her students, most of them Kenyan citizens went on to set up decent neonatal units in many rural and urban hospitals and observed is a gradual increase in survival

of pre-term infants. The Kenyatta National Hospital Neonatal Unit, the Unit she led for many years is one of the first of only two Neonatal Intensive Care Units of its kind in Kenya and the one of the very few in the ECSA region. Her students from many other African countries, including among others Zimbabwe, Mauritius, South Sudan, Uganda and Sierra Leone, have been the vehicle for south-to-south transfer of skills in newborn care.

#### Responding to the disaster of the HIV/AIDS epidemic

Prof Musoke contributed to the response towards the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Kenya. She was part of a team that wrote a manual to support the pioneer programs on integration of prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV into health services in sub-Saharan Africa. Prof Musoke wrote the sections on infant feeding and the code, and in less than 3 years the bulk of that manual was adopted by WHO, improved and then brought back as the standard WHO guideline on PMCT which has been used to train health workers everywhere to integrate this as part of the maternal child health services. She also served as the consultant paediatrician coordinating the clinical services for the Lea Toto Community Program, a child centered HIV program, the first to offer anti-retroviral treatment (ART) to Kenyan children. Launched in 1998, this hybrid institution and home-based care program in Nairobi's informal settlements provided HIV+ children and their families with medical attention, prevention education, counseling, and self-help skills in eight communities reaching more than 5000 children. She also regularly provided medical care to children living with HIV/Aids at the Nyumbani Children's Centre in Nairobi with devotion for many years, even after retiring from the University of Nairobi.

God blessed Prof Musoke with good health to the end, she was able to see the smooth transition of the services she built to those she trained and who are equally passionate about newborns. Her CV which is on the internet is illustrative of the different areas one can serve to protect the interests of children. We will surely miss Prof Musoke. We thank her family and her nation of Uganda for sharing

her with us.

May her soul rest in everlasting eternal peace.

#### From Medical School Classmate

Rachel studied in the same Medical school class with me from undergraduate, internship and Master of Medicine degrees in which she studied Paediatrics while I did General Surgery. Rachel was low key, social and passed all her examinations easily. After her return to Uganda after an outstanding career in Nairobi, she contacted me and joined my organization, African Center for Global Health and Social Transformation (ACHEST) as a Consultant. She attended our weekly staff meetings and was in the process of developing a project on Neonatology a subject to which she was totally committed to. Rachel has gone too soon. May the Lord rest her soul in eternal peace.

Francis Omaswa, Executive Director, ACHEST.

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