In Memoriam:

**Professor Andrew Masson**, pioneer neurosurgeon at the University College Hospital of the West Indies (UCHWI), Jamaica, died in Edmonton, Canada, on August 18, 2015 at the age of 88. It is important that we remember and honour this great man.

In 1962 Professor Masson singlehandedly founded the specialty of neurosurgery in Jamaica. Today it seems inconceivable that such a large population would have had no access to even the simplest of neurosurgical procedures that could be life-saving. Only the very exceptional wealthy person could seek such surgery in North America or the UK.

**Formative Years**

Andrew Masson was born in Jamaica in 1927 and grew up in Belize (then British Honduras). He was awarded a scholarship in 1944 to study medicine at St. Thomas' Hospital in London. Thus, at the age of 17, he travelled up to New York and then to England on the Queen Elizabeth, a troop ship at the time, to arrive in wartime London. He made many friends in England and even though far from home he grew to be very happy there. He graduated in 1951 and stayed on to specialize.

The Professor and Chief of Surgery said, “Masson, I want to train you as a surgeon to return to teach at the new medical school in Kingston, Jamaica.” Back in 1948 the University (then UCWI) had opened with its first faculty being Medicine. The University Hospital (UCHWI) opened in 1953, and in 1956 the graduation of its first cohort of 15 young physicians was exuberantly celebrated.

Meanwhile, in November 1955, Andrew acquired two FRCS’ and a wife, all within the month! Sheila was a charming Jamaican lady whom he met while she was on holiday in London. In late 1956 they arrived in Jamaica and Andrew joined Drs. John Golding (orthopedics) and Harry Anamunthodo (general surgery) as senior registrar.

At this time the new university, medical school and hospital were in youthful, vigorous swing, and being a keen general surgeon and natural teacher Andrew was kept happily busy. But he gradually realized that “neurosurgery was the big gap in the surgical services at the UCHWI and indeed in the medical services in Jamaica. A ‘head case’ was always a great worry and I saw patients die who could have been saved by someone with neurosurgical experience. I decided that I should try to help the situation.”

So back to London he went, but only for a year. He could not tolerate another prolonged period of training away from family and friends. He returned feeling confident that he could deal with head
injuries – “a good entry into neurosurgery in general”.

But Andrew embarked on his new career path with considerable trepidation, overwhelmingly aware of his partial training in this complicated field. Help arrived from an unexpected area.

Formally, Canada had nothing to do with UCWI/UWI, which was a British creation. But they did informally re Neuro surgery. Canadian neurosurgeons came for long and repeated visits and moulded Andrew into a master neurosurgeon.

About the same time there were droves of UWI grads going to Canada for further training (mainly to Toronto), and many of course stayed, and hence eventually the UWIMAA Chapter, which is mainly Toronto based, was formed.

For a while another of Andrew’s dreams came true – he was joined by Jamaica’s first neurologist, Dr. Pamela Rogers. After she left, further help from Canada arrived in the form of several visiting neurologists. Eventually Dr. Owen Morgan filled the much needed role of academic neurologist.

1960’s – 1970’s

In spite of his training in the UK, from the Canadians, plus his own self learning and immense experience, Andrew longed for fully trained colleagues. In 1967 Dr. John McHardy, a Jamaican trained in Britain, established a neurosurgical service at the Kingston Public Hospital, and he and Andrew collaborated on patients. The real change occurred in the early 1970’s when Dr. James Cross joined the UWI staff. Then followed Dr. Ivor Crandon, a UWI graduate who trained first in Jamaica and then Glasgow. Professor Crandon returned to establish a neurosurgery training programme and currently there are several neurosurgeons in Jamaica and in the English speaking Caribbean.

The Canadian Years

In 1975 Andrew, Sheila and their three children emigrated to Edmonton, Canada. Ever the versatile physician, surgeon, and administrator, Andrew became the Director of the Emergency Department at the University Hospital, and later Chairman of Ambulatory Care.

He retired in 1992 and continued to enjoy his passions of cooking, reading, listening to music, growing amazing and exotic orchids, gardening, and enjoying his family and grandchildren. And people! Ever affable, he collected great numbers of friends and acquaintances. He loved keeping in touch with them by phoning, writing, visiting and occasionally emailing (the last of which he hated). A great raconteur, he loved swapping stories and anecdotes. His were always the first Christmas cards to arrive – home-made with a photograph of one of his gorgeous orchids and a long personal and cheerful note.
I was extremely fortunate to know Andrew for six decades – from schoolboy in short pants to professor at McGill. He and Sheila were close friends of my parents, my father being the founding Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at UCWI. As a medical student I fell under his charismatic spell, attended his rounds and was acting houseman on his firm. I almost became a neurosurgeon though finally settled on neurology. Andrew followed my career with intense interest and pride. I was lucky and deeply moved to be able to spend a couple of hours with Andrew and Sheila a few weeks before he passed away.

Andrew was the very antithesis of the much caricatured cutting surgeon. He had a deep, personal relationship with his patients. He knew where they came from, what work they did, details of their families, and he seldom forgot their names even decades later.

There are several definitions of the word *humanist*, and the one that epitomizes Andrew is a person with a strong concern for human welfare, values, and dignity. He was a consummate teacher and was immensely popular with surgical trainees, medical students and indeed the entire hospital staff. He mentored many and delighted in their successes. We can only hope that we have in our turn, espoused and passed on at least some of these values learned from this extraordinary man.

John Stewart,
(UWI class of 1969; Emeritus Professor, McGill University),
Vancouver, Canada.

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