

In memoriam

Professor Jemal Abdulkadir

Elias S Siraj, Ahmed Reja, and Solomon Tesfaye

On Saturday August 24th, 2013, the world diabetes community lost Professor Jemal Abdulkadir, a pioneer of diabetes care in his native country, Ethiopia and the African continent.

When the history of modern medicine in Ethiopia is written, Professor Jemal Abdulkadir's name will be up there as one of the architects who shaped Ethiopia's medical services, influencing many generations to come.

Professor Jemal Abdulkadir was born in the southwestern Ethiopian town of Gore in 1935. He completed his elementary education at his home town and then moved to Addis Ababa to finish his high school at Teferi Mekonnen High School. After attending 2 years of college education at Addis Ababa University he went to Canada to join the McGill University in Montreal where he got his MD degree (1959). In subsequent years, he got his DCMT from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (1964), and did his postgraduate studies in internal medicine at the Royal Postgraduate School of Medicine, London University (1966). Finally, he completed his endocrinology training at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary in Scotland (1979).

His professional services in the Ethiopian healthcare system included progressive clinical appointments, starting from Staff Physician at the Princess Tsehai Memorial Hospital to Senior Consultant Physician at the Black Lion Teaching and Tertiary Referral Hospital (1979–1998). While working in these hospitals, he was a full-time academic at the Addis Ababa University Faculty of Medicine, where over the years he rose from Assistant Professor to a full Professor position. During those times he also served as Chief of the Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism Unit as well as Head of the Department of Internal Medicine.



Prof. Jemal Abdulkadir was one of the first few Ethiopian physicians to introduce modern Western medicine to Ethiopia. Despite opportunities to stay in the West and settle there with a comfortable life, he returned to Ethiopia to make a difference and improve the health-care system of the country. Over the years, he also served his country in the following leadership capacities at various times: Minister of Health of Ethiopia, President of the Ethiopian Medical Association, Editor of the *Ethiopian Medical Journal*, President of the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, President of the Ethiopian Diabetes Association, and one of the founding members of the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences.

As the first endocrinologist in Ethiopia, he established one of the first dedicated diabetes clinics in the country and played a key role in establishing the Ethiopian Diabetes Association where he was President, taking a significant part in expanding diabetes management services throughout the country.

The three of us knew him personally in various capacities since the early 1990s. In addition to being an inspirational figure, he has been a mentor to us all and we have collaborated with him in the areas of medical care, medical education, and research.

Professor Jemal Abdulkadir was the ideal academic physician (of the Osler type) who combined great clinical skills, outstanding teaching capacity, and extraordinary research accomplishment. Over the years, we have observed how much he was loved by his patients who came to see him in droves, literally from all corners of Ethiopia! He was also an astute teacher with a very sharp mind and always knew what was clinically important. In our eyes though, what distinguished him from several others was his dedication to research. He was one of the leading researchers on diabetes in Africa and his research was original and very relevant and was published in high quality journals including *Diabetologia* and *Diabetes Care*. He was one of the key people in the world to publish on malnutrition-related diabetes mellitus (MRDM), influencing the World Health Organization (WHO) at that time to create a separate category for the condition. His work in this area was recognised worldwide, such that when an international workshop on diabetes peculiar to the tropics was conducted in 1995, he was the sole representative of the entire continent of Africa. He has also

Elias S Siraj, MD, FACP, FACE, Associate Professor of Medicine, Director, Diabetes Program, Program Director, Endocrinology Fellowship, Temple University School of Medicine and Hospital, Philadelphia, USA;
Ahmed Reja, MD, Chief Executive Director, College of Health Sciences, Head, Endocrine Unit, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia; and
Solomon Tesfaye MD, FRCP, Consultant Physician/ Honorary Professor of Diabetic Medicine (University of Sheffield), Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield, UK.

Obituary

done some original work related to islet cell antibodies, c-peptides, and HLA in Ethiopians.

The other distinguishing feature of Professor Jemal Abdulkadir was his broad knowledge and interests outside of medicine. His understanding of human history, literature, culture, and politics was tremendous and pure joy to witness and engage. As a physician, he was not just focused on immediate medical care but was acutely aware of the social responsibility the physician has towards the patient and society at large. The ethical practice of medicine was one of his areas of interests which he pursued within the Ethiopian Medical Association and beyond.

Prof Jemal Abdulkadir has been a dedicated servant to the people of Ethiopia. His extraordinary knowledge, exemplary attitude, and unique personality have been a source of inspiration for generations of healthcare professionals who had the honour and privilege to be trained under him and interact with him. His dedicated service spanning over half a century has left an everlasting imprint in his country.

Ethiopia (or for that matter the world) is the poorer

for the loss of far-sighted and dedicated doctors such as Prof. Jemal Abdulkadir who worked tirelessly to train, mentor, and inspire many of our current prominent physicians and endocrinologists, and engaged in diabetes research relevant to Ethiopia. His work ethic was exemplary, working full-time until very recently and always emphasising the need to improve the quality and standard of medical care. He led a meaningful life of service to others and a life of principles imbedded in his deep sense of responsibility to humanity. He was simply a very humble man with deep compassion for his fellow mankind. William James once remarked, 'the great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.' I think all will agree that this quote is befitting of Professor Jemal Abdulkadir.

He will be missed, but will not be forgotten... and his deeds and influence will live for ever. Prof. Jemal is survived by his wife and two sons. Our condolences go to his family, the whole Ethiopian medical community, and the world diabetes community at large.

May his soul rest in peace!



The Black Lion Teaching and Tertiary Referral Hospital (left) where Prof Jemal Abdulkadir worked for many years. While working here he was a full-time academic at the Addis Ababa University Faculty of Medicine (right),