OBITUARY

Dr Adolf Saweri MBE, MD (Hon, UPNG), Dip Med & Surg (PMC), DTM&H (Liverpool)

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Dr Adolf Saweri passed away in the early hours of Sunday 11 November 2012, Armistice Day or the Day of Peace. In 1960 he came from what was then Dutch New Guinea to Port Moresby to be trained at the Papuan Medical College (PMC) as a medical doctor. In the same group were several other young men seeking tertiary education in medicine and other fields, including Dr Ambrose Suebu, the late Dr Chris Marjen, the late Dr Peter Pangkatana, the late Dr Hein Danomira and Rev. Dr Joshua Daimoi.

Adolf trained as an Assistant Medical Practitioner (AMP) from 1962 to 1965, graduating with the Diploma in Medicine & Surgery. Between 1966 and 1969 he was posted to different parts of this country as a resident medical officer (RMO) and as a service medical officer working at Nonga Base Hospital (Rabaul), Boram Hospital (Wewak), Saiho Rural Health Centre in Northern (Oro) Province, Kerowagi Hospital in Chimbu (Simbu) Province and Okapa Rural Health Centre in the Eastern Highlands.

The young Dr Saweri then decided that he would follow the pathway of his mentor, Professor Ian Maddocks, to become a specialist physician and an academic in Internal Medicine.

In 1971 he was accepted as a Senior Resident Medical Officer at the Royal Prince Alfred (RPA) Hospital in Sydney, becoming the first doctor from Papua New Guinea (PNG) to work in the world-renowned teaching hospital. He succeeded in this highly competitive environment, paving the way for those of us who followed. He worked under eminent specialists and was remembered for, among other things, his skill in lumbar punctures and in performing a lymph node excision biopsy under local anaesthesia when the expectation was to take the patient to the operating theatre.

In 1972 he undertook postgraduate studies at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in the United Kingdom. He graduated with the Diploma in Tropical Medicine & Hygiene (DTM&H). This training prepared him to be an expert in infectious diseases, including malaria.

When he returned from the UK in January 1973, he became the first native medical doctor and the first native physician to take up an academic position. For Dr Adolf Saweri, a home-grown product, to become a physician and a Lecturer in Medicine and join expatriate physicians in the pre-Independence era was indeed a major achievement.

Adolf’s PNG, RPA and Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine experience combined to make him a top clinician, a comprehensive teacher, an admirable mentor and, above all, an Ambassador of Clinical Medicine. In the resource-limited environment of PNG he realized the fundamental importance of a thorough history, a thorough and skilled examination and the use of simple and available tests. He gave an enormous amount of time and patience to listen to a patient’s presenting medical complaints. He excelled in three subspecialties of Internal Medicine. He developed Respiratory Medicine in PNG and established the Asthma Clinic at Port Moresby.

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Moresby General Hospital (PMGH). His special interest in Neurology dated from the days when he worked in Okapa and saw patients with kuru, which is principally a cerebellar neurodegenerative disease. This, together with his long-time involvement with the PNG Institute of Medical Research, was respected by the scientific community when he and Professor Michael Alpers and a number of other scientists attended the landmark celebration marking the end of kuru that was held in London at the Royal Society in October 2007. In his third area of expertise Adolf functioned as the Infectious Diseases encyclopaedia for his colleagues.

Adolf served the Faculty and School and the PMGH for almost 40 years, making an enormous contribution to the country's first university, and imparting his knowledge and wisdom to doctors and specialist physicians now practising in PNG, the Pacific, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. He was chairman of the Department (Division) of Clinical Sciences for 24 years from 1988. He was a founding member of the Association of Physicians of Papua New Guinea, and served for 38 years on the Council of the PNG Institute of Medical Research – for 33 years as the Council Chairman. In 2002 Adolf was made an Inaugural Life Member of the Medical Society of Papua New Guinea and in 2008 he was awarded the MBE for his contribution to Medicine, Medical Education and Health Services. In the same year he was awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Medicine by the University of Papua New Guinea in recognition of his contribution to Medical Education and Clinical Sciences.

Adolf’s ‘Medical Treasure Box’ is no longer with us – but he will be remembered as a pioneer in the development of medicine in PNG, an outstanding physician and teacher, a humble man imbued with a very high intellect, a man of wisdom and, for many of us, a true friend and colleague.