

ASSOCIATION NEWS

OBITUARY

Professor J O M Pobe: The Indefatigable Physician

“Lucy Pobe has asked me to tell you that her husband, Professor Joe Pobe, has been called Home to GLORY” was how General (Retired) Joshua Hamidu broke the shattering news to me from Accra by telephone. Shattering for us because of our loss but, for Joe who is now at rest from his labours, he is with The LORD, which is far, far better. I rang Lucy late at night when most of the visitors would have left, and expressed our heartfelt Condolences (Rosemary’s and mine and those of our children).

The following comment from one doctor of the younger generation with whom I had exchanged e-mail messages relating to GMA Forum affairs sums up the feeling of hoards of medical students (undergraduate and postgraduate) and of nurses whom Joe Pobe taught: “He was indeed one of the best teachers I ever had”. Many will sorely feel his loss, not least the many patients who had benefited so much from his care.

The Scottish divine who said “Live so as to be missed” could easily have had Professor Joe Pobe in mind. Whatever he put his hands to he did very well. But not just his hands; his feet too. I well remember in London University, his medical school (Royal London College of Medicine) had a football match against the first eleven of Westminster Hospital School of Medicine where I was the “Inside Left” striker. I made a mistake by scoring the first goal against Joe’s team. What followed was stunning. Joe took control of his team where he played centre forward, and simply wiped the floor with us. He had brought along Lucy who was also a London University medical student at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine, to cheer him from the side lines at the Cobham playing fields in Surrey. Joe would not be defeated with his future wife shouting cheers from the side lines. Though that was over half a century ago, he would have done the Black Stars proud. He played tennis too. Joe, Dodu, Afoakwa, and Boohene formed an unbeatable quartet, occasionally inviting Professor Kwapong and others to enliven things.

Dr Joe Pobe excelled at Clinical and Epidemiological Research. His work on High Blood Pressure is known internationally. It was fitting that he gave a scintillating Ghana@50 Lecture last year on High Blood Pressure at the Conference Hall. The Lecture was ably chaired by Professor Samuel Ofose-Amaah. I was sitting next to Professor Fred Sai, the doyen of Ghanaian Epidemiol-

ogy. Professor Alex Kwapong was among the first to congratulate him on the brilliant lecture which did not fail to shake us somewhat with the horrendous figures indicating how many Ghanaians above any respectable age had high blood pressure. Quite frightening!

When, some 20 years or so ago I travelled through African countries on an AIDS fact finding tour, I discovered Professor Joe Pobe in Lusaka directing research with Professor Ann Bayley and others in the University of Zambia Medical School on AIDS and Tuberculosis. Whatever branch of Medicine he had to deal with Joe Pobe had the tools to tackle. On Ward Rounds, Joe was a Clinical Detective. Step by step he would arrive at the hidden diagnosis – something we both learnt at Korle Bu from Professor Silas Dodu and Dr Albert Hawe. Armed with a stethoscope, there was no heart murmur he could not decipher even before the modern gadgets of Echocardiograms and Dopplers. I am pretty certain his beloved Lucy would confirm that Joe Pobe made diagnoses on himself all along the way before The LORD took him.

Gratitude to Colleagues: When 3 years ago Joe Pobe was gravely ill and he pulled through, Lucy Pobe e-mailed me to say how thankful he was to Professor Frimpong-Boateng and his able team at the National Cardio-Thoracic Centre for their remarkable intervention.

Joe Pobe the Gentleman: He always (or almost always) listened carefully first before opening his mouth. In this I wish was like him. Not too late for me to learn from him. And when Joe felt he was wrong somewhere he promptly apologised. Laid back, and with his distinctive sonorous voice, Joe Pobe always commanded respect. He was never afraid to do what he thought was right, as the following story undoubtedly shows.

ACCRA CHAPEL: This was how Accra Chapel came to be in the debt of Professor Pobe. We had been worshipping for many years in the Class Rooms of the Nurses’ Training College through the courtesy of Awura Adjoa Walter-Holtz. The Congregation had grown in size and we could not forever rely on the generosity of NTC. After much prayer the then Minister Rev Walter Pinpong, supported by church members Irene Darkwa, Agyiri-Wellington, Dorwuona Owoo, Mr Ackuom, Titus Van Dyck and others approached the Korle Bu Hospital Authorities to release a plot of

land to us to build a House of God. Who would be the 'Boss' (or 'Acting Boss') of Korle Bu Teaching Hospital at the precise time that Walter Pinpong called with our need? The same person who had, a few years earlier, while acting as 'Boss of Korle Bu', passed on the letter to me from Head of State General Fred Akuffo accepting that I could retire from the Public Services – namely Professor J O M Pobee. Providentially, Joe listened carefully to what Walter Pinpong had to say. "Leave it to me" Joe appeared to have said, and within a reasonably short time Korle Bu land had been acquired for Accra Chapel, and the present Minister Rev Dr T B Dankwa and his congregation and elders and deacons pushed things forward to produce what we see now. PRAISE THE LORD for Professor Joe Pobee who helped us in this matter. This is where I break down in tears at the thought of God's Providence. And for Joe Pobee to make Accra Chapel, Korle Bu, his last resting place before burial, makes the tears flow even more.

The President of the Ghana Medical Association has this to say about Professor JOM Pobee:

I believe there are many who have in one way or the other shared in the life and achievements of Professor Pobee. Those of you doctors who have retired or just about to join this group of individuals who become more active in retirement will remember this pleasant doctor of a characteristic benign disposition. Not only did he teach you to become doctors like him, if not better, but also groomed you in your formative years as house officers, medical officers and residents and even specialists. Some of you were bold to go up to him after graduation and refer to him as 'colleague'. There are many more that have passed through his hands even until his passing away. You all bear witness to what he did for medicine and health in Ghana.

The Ghana Medical Association recalls his role in hectic political matters of state during the period 1972 to 1979. Indeed, after the dramatics of June 1979 he became the Vice President of the Ghana Medical Association from 1981 to 1983 and its President from 1983 to 1985. In the heat of the revolution, he as Vice President and his Honourable Secretary were "invited" for discussion with the Inspector General of Police. This "invitation" he declined necessitating a period of "vanishing act" by the distinguished Vice President of the Ghana Medical Association. Fortunately, the matter was settled amicably at home.

The life of Uncle Joe on the Korle Bu campus was not limited to being physician, researcher in cardiovascular

I can write no further. I leave others to mention Joe's many achievements in the Ghana Academy of Arts & Sciences, in the Colleges of Physicians at home and abroad, in the Medical Associations at home and abroad, in the Heart Associations at home and abroad, at Korle Bu Teaching Hospital, in the University Of Ghana Medical School, in the Danfa Project, and so on. Let us emulate Joe Pobee's good points. The best of men are but men at best. None of us will appear in Glory with our good deeds. Only the merits of The LORD JESUS CHRIST will let us through. Dear Lucy, and all the lovely family, we mourn with you and thank GOD for Joe Pobee.

**Tribute by Professor Felix I D Konotey-Ahulu
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epidemiology, Hospital Administrator, Head of the Department of Medicine and Vice Dean of the Medical School. He was a member of the "Lawn Tennis Club" and a visitor to the Senior Common Room after playing lawn tennis. The senior common room was one of the places to catch him for consultations about patients and advice. Many doctors went to him for advice and many lives were touched by him. One young doctor recalls how on his return home from training abroad was eager to assist any senior who called on his time and expertise. He was gently advised "Beware you do not become everyone's dog." This was said with that look of his that included slightly more of the white of his eyes. The message sank in deep and fixed in the young man's mind and has been one of his guiding principles.

Professor Pobee was born in Cape Coast on 26th July 1930. He attended Adisadel College and the University of the Gold Coast before leaving for the London Hospital Medical College, University of London from 1956 to 1961 when he qualified as a doctor by graduating MB, BS(London). After his first pre-registration job in surgery and gynaecology in London he returned to Ghana and worked at various hospitals including the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital. He subsequently returned to England for his postgraduate training in Internal medicine and obtained the MRCP qualification in 1967. He returned home in 1968 and joined the University of Ghana Medical School as a lecturer. He was promoted in time to Full Professor in 1987. I wish to draw particular attention to how quickly he returned home after each training stint, something we miss these days.

Professor Pobee will be missed by us all and the Ghana Medical Association will forever remember his contribution to its growth especially during the 1970s and early 80's. We will also remember his academic and professional competence, benevolence and his sense of humour.

To his wife, Auntie Lucy, the children and grand children we pray the Lord for guidance and support at this time of great loss.

May his Soul Rest in Peace.

Ghana Medical Association
