

OBITUARY – GEORGE EMMANUEL KAFULAFULA

by Professor R. Broadhead



The late Dr George E. Kafulafula

On 28th August 2009 the College of Medicine suffered the sad loss of its Vice Principal, Dr George Emmanuel Kafulafula after a short illness.

George Emmanuel Kafulafula was born on the 10th June 1963 at Likuni, Lilongwe. He was the second son with four sisters. After attending primary school, George gained his secondary education at Mtendere Secondary School, 1978-82, and at Kamuzu Academy 1982-1984. George was admitted to Chancellor College and successfully attained a Bachelor of Science, in 1987 majoring in Biology.

In 1986 the Malawi Government resolved to set up its own medical school through the Tripartite Agreement, together with the Government of Germany (west) and the UK. George Kafulafula was selected to be in the first cohort of students to be sent to the UK sponsored through the British Council. He was admitted to St Bartholomews Hospital in the University of London and there undertook studies in the basic medical sciences and two years of clinical practice. During this time preparations had been underway in Malawi to receive medical students to complete their final year medical training at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital, Blantyre. George together with 13 fellow Malawian students returned to Malawi as the first pioneers group of graduates to qualify with the MBBS degree from the University of

Malawi in July 1992.

On completing his initial training, George Kafulafula undertook 18 months internship at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital and then accepted the post of Senior Medical Officer at Trinity Mission Hospital, Muona. It was his experience of the problems of pregnancy in Malawian mothers at Trinity Hospital that made George Kafulafula decide to specialize in Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

In 1995 he applied for and was accepted as a Staff Associate in Obstetrics and Gynaecology in the University of Malawi, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology based at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital. The following year 1996 George was sent to Makerere University, Uganda to undertake his specialist training. However due to political unrest in Uganda at the time which adversely affected the training in the University Hospital of Mulago, the College of Medicine arranged for George to be transferred to the Nelson Mandela Medical School in the University of Natal, South Africa to complete his training. This he did and in October 2000 was awarded his fellowship of the College of Obstetrician and Gynaecologists of South Africa and the following year the degree of Master of Medicine for his research work funded through a WHO fellowship award.

In July 2002 George Kafulafula returned to Malawi to take up the post of Lecturer in Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the College of Medicine and was promoted to Senior Lecturer the following year. In the face of the HIV pandemic affecting Malawi, George soon become deeply involved in research into risk factors in HIV/Aids transmission to Malawian women.

Together with other colleagues based in the College of Medicine/Johns Hopkins Research Project, George's research led him to explore ways in which the risks of HIV/Aids acquisition could be reduced. He was particularly concerned to reduce the transmission of the HIV virus from mother to child in the perinatal period. His research work has contributed directly to prophylactic drug interventions in the newborn period that have significantly reduced HIV maternal to infant transmission in Malawian infants. In a corpus of over 20 publish research papers published in international medical journals, George has demonstrated his constant concern for Malawian women and their reproductive health.

In September 2003 George was elected Deputy Postgraduate Dean and in December 2003 Head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. This was a recognition of his great skills as a teacher and trainer of both undergraduate and postgraduate students. He combined a rare degree of compassion with great attention to detail that endeared him to his students. His care for his students' welfare was widely acknowledged and he served as a role-model in the practice

of his profession.

In 2007 George was selected to be Vice Principal of the College of Medicine. This was a recognition by his colleagues and the University of his fine administrative abilities. He served as Chairperson on many College Committees. He was a member of numerous national and international bodies. These included being President and founding member of the Association of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of Malawi, member of the International AIDS Society, member of the Network Executive Committee, International Pediatric Adolescent Aids Clinical Trials (IMPAACT) Research Group and Trustee of the Association of Malawian Midwives, to name but few.

George Kafulafula will be most remembered by his colleagues and patients for the great and compassionate physician which he was. Always he put his patients and students first. He was meticulous in the discharge of his academic and administrative responsibilities. Many evenings, when others had gone home, the light in George's office would be seen burning, late into the night indicating his dedication to his work.

The College of Medicine has lost a much loved and admired member of its staff. However George Kafulafula's fine example as a compassionate doctor will live on through his students and colleagues with whom he taught, trained and practiced.

George leaves a wife Ursula whom he married in 1st August 1992 and sons Emmanuel and Mateus.

The College of Medicine, colleagues and friends has set up a George Kafulafula Memorial Fund in his honour.

Those wishing to contribute should send donations to the "GEORGE KAFULAFULA MEMORIAL FUND"

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