OBITUARY

Professor Stephen D Lawn, 1966–2016

STEPHEN LAWN, BMedSci, MB, BS (Hons), MD, FRCP, DTM&H Dip HIV Med, one of the great doctors and outstanding scientists of his time, died on 23 September 2016 from an aggressive cerebral glioblastoma multiforme that he had battled with for 2 years. Despite repeated chemotherapy and progressive disease, he bravely continued to work and teach up until 2 months before his death. At the time of his death, he was Professor of Infectious Diseases and Tropical Medicine at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK, and honorary associate Professor of Infectious Diseases and HIV Medicine at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Born in 1966, the youngest of three boys, he grew up in Yorkshire and won a place at the University of Nottingham to read medicine. There, he found his vocation and Joy, the love of his life, whom he married in December 1989. He was a hugely talented man. At undergraduate level, he won eight awards, including the John Moir Gold Medal for the best student in general medicine. He continued this remarkable achievement in his post-graduate years with numerous awards, honors and fellowships from diverse bodies, including the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the British Infection Society, The Royal Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene (the Chalmers Medal), the University of Cape Town, the International AIDS Society, the Association of Physicians of India, the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (the Union Scientific Award) and Wellcome Trust fellowships. These awards were given to him in recognition of his prodigious and high-quality research on HIV-associated tuberculosis in sub-Saharan Africa.

After completing his clinical training in infectious diseases in London, Steve first engaged in tuberculosis work in 1993 in Ghana, where he researched and taught at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi until 1997. From there, he moved to Atlanta, GA, USA, as a Wellcome Trust Fellow, to conduct laboratory-based research on the pathogenesis of HIV and tuberculosis. He returned to London in 2001, working at St George’s Hospital and the Hospital for Tropical Diseases, before leaving for Cape Town in 2005 with further funding from the Wellcome Trust.

For the next seven years, based at the University of Cape Town’s Institute of Infectious Diseases and Molecular Medicine, he conducted clinical, epidemiological and laboratory studies in HIV-associated tuberculosis. His passion was to stop the 400 000 HIV-associated tuberculosis deaths that occur each year, most of them in Southern Africa. His pioneering work in this regard focused on the role of anti-retroviral therapy in preventing HIV-associated tuberculosis and developing and evaluating new diagnostics for tuberculosis, especially urine-based tests to be used at the bedside, for screening patients with HIV. This research led to a prolific scientific output, with over 250 papers published in peer-reviewed journals, many of these high impact and highly cited. His gift of being able to write so much, so quickly, with the science so sound and always expressed so clearly and beautifully, was legendary. He was well known, admired and respected nationally and internationally and served on several World Health Organization Guidelines Committees where he ensured that ground-breaking research could move to policy and from there to practice.

In 2012, Steve, Joy and their two children, Timothy and Joanna, returned to London, where he contributed greatly to the work and life of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Bloomsbury Centre for Global Health Research and the School’s Tuberculosis Centre. As Principal Investigator, he acquired funding from the UK Medical Research Council, the UK Department for International Development and the Wellcome Trust for the STAMP Trial, which aims to reduce facility-based deaths from HIV-associated tuberculosis in Malawi and South Africa through the use of a novel bedside urine-based tuberculosis screening strategy.

Steve will be remembered not only for his outstanding science and contributions to health, and especially HIV-associated tuberculosis in Africa, but for his many other qualities and talents, his friendship, his humanity and his wonderful sense of humour. At the last STAMP Trial Steering Committee meeting in April 2016, when the chair waved three fingers at him to indicate that his time for the progress update was exceeded, he smiled and said, ‘Chair, I have a dense homonymous hemianopia and I cannot see your three fingers.’ His passion, his faith, his energy, his meticulous approach to planning, preparing for and conducting research, his determination
and courage to always see every project through to its conclusion, were truly inspiring and will continue to inspire long after his death. He was a great man.

The Stephen Lawn Memorial Fund for TB and AIDS Research Leadership has been set up to commemorate the life and work of Stephen Lawn. This will support a lecture, to be given annually at the time of World TB Day (24 March) in London and Cape Town by a leading TB researcher, as well as a monetary prize for an upcoming researcher conducting promising work focused on reducing the disease burden of TB and HIV/AIDS in Africa. The fund will be jointly managed by the TB Centre in London, the International Union against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease in Paris, and the Desmond Tutu HIV Centre in Cape Town. The Fund site is: http://campaign.justgiving.com/charity/lsohatm/stevelawnmemorialfund

ANTHONY D HARRIES*
LINDA-GAIL BEKKER†
*International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease
Paris, France
†The Desmond Tutu HIV Centre
University of Cape Town
Cape Town, South Africa
e-mail: adharries@theunion.org