

## Obituary

### **DAVID MOLESWORTH, MD, OBE** 1913–1986

Dr David Molesworth, OBE, who dedicated his life to the treatment of leprosy, died on December 15. He was 73.

Brownlow David Molesworth was born on February 10, 1913. He was educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and studied medicine at the London Hospital. After qualifying in 1937, he was appointed medical officer to the Grenfell Mission, which worked to improve the health of eskimos. He spent the following year in Labrador working with them, in particular advising on dietary matters. But he spent most of his career in the tropics. In 1939 he joined the Colonial Medical Service and was sent to Singapore as general duty medical officer. But his work there was cut short with the Japanese invasion in 1942, and he spent the next three years in a PoW camp.

It was only by chance, while awaiting repatriation from Singapore, that he became interested in leprosy. He heard of a vacancy for an officer in charge of the leprosarium at Sungai Buluh, Malaysia. He got the job, and remained there for the next decade. On his arrival he found many patients near death from malnutrition, a sight that he never forgot. But the timing of his appointment to Sungai Buluh was auspicious. There were, on the one hand, several thousand severely ill and deformed patients, for whom there was no known treatment; on the other hand, recent tentative claims were made that such leprosy had responded favourably to a sulphone drug, dapsone. He pioneered the use of this, conducting successful programmes of mass treatment while never losing interest in individual patients.

In 1956 he went for two years to Geneva as adviser to the World Health Organization's leprosy section. From there he went to Ghana where he was director of the government's leprosy service at Elmina. His final post, in 1966, was as director of the British Leprosy Relief Association's control project in Malawi. He retired in 1979.

Molesworth was an extrovert personality with a "George the Fifth" beard. He was a good teacher, and his enthusiasm for his subject inspired his colleagues. He was also a keen ornithologist, especially knowledgeable about the bird life of Malawi.

His wife, Rosemary, whom he married in the late 1930s, survives him, together with their two sons and two daughters.

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After working in Malaya with people suffering from leprosy and as a consultant with WHO, Geneva, David Molesworth joined the Ghana Leprosy Service in 1959 to take charge of that Service. He was able to build on the relatively new concept of mobile treatment work until the whole of the country was covered. He also introduced reconstructive surgery at the Ankafu Leprosarium and, with his superb skill as a surgeon, many patients benefited from his work. With his knowledge of WHO and UNICEF he was able to procure much equipment and medical supplies for the Service which was to prove invaluable when economic stringency was affecting the country.

Early in 1966 David transferred from Ghana to Malaŵi to direct the Lepra Control Project which had been established in the south of the country. So successful was this Project that the Malaŵi Government asked Lepra to expand its work to cover the whole of Malaŵi and, under David's direction this was done. With far sighted planning the country was divided into regions and each region established mobile treatment work, in most cases supervised by a doctor with appropriate support facilities.

In addition, and due to the absence of a dermatologist in Malaŵi, David inaugurated a general skin clinic at the central hospital in Blantyre where patients were referred to him for advice and treatment. In this way David was able to make the fact of a leprosy treatment centre in the middle of Blantyre acceptable to the general public thus overcoming hostility to the Project when it was first mooted.

David was exceptional in all that he did. He was an expert ornithologist and an ardent angler. He took an active part in the Malaŵi Fauna Society. Photography was one of his delights.

He will be missed by many people and there are leprosy patients throughout the world who will be saddened by his death, for David's endearing characteristic was his genuine friendliness and concern for all he served. He inspired great confidence in his patients, whoever they were, and his name was always on their lips.

Those who worked with him have lost a very kind friend and counsellor.

J ELDON