In Memoriam

Remembering Kanu Chatterjee
A Gentle Giant of Cardiology

Prediman K. Shah, MD; William Parmley, MD; Donald Heistad, MD

On March 4, 2015, Kanu Chatterjee, MBBS, a beloved physician, cardiologist, healer, teacher, and charismatic mentor, passed away peacefully in Iowa City, Iowa, after a brief battle with cancer. His passing has created an irretrievable loss for the field of cardiovascular medicine, because he was the essence of a clinician-teacher-investigator. Kanu was soft-spoken, kind, and wise; he was a practitioner of extraordinary skill, and spiritual. We were privileged to know this gentle giant of cardiology.

Dr Kanu Chatterjee was born in Bangladesh, India, and received his medical degree from the R. G. Kar Medical College, Calcutta, India, while still living in a refugee camp in Calcutta. He moved to England in 1963, where he completed additional training in medicine and cardiology at St. George’s Hospital and the Royal Brompton Hospital, earning membership in the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and London. Kanu rapidly established his reputation as a brilliant clinical cardiologist.

In 1970, at the urging of 2 cardiologists at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center (Howard Allen, MD, and Harvey Alpern, MD, whom he met at St. Georges Hospital in London) as well as Graham Miller, PhD, of London, H. J. C. Swan, MD, then the director of cardiology at Cedars-Sinai, recruited Kanu to join the Division of Cardiology and eventually run the coronary care unit and the National Institutes of Health–sponsored Myocardial Infarction Research Unit at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. During his 4-year tenure at Cedars-Sinai, Kanu achieved a mythical status as a dedicated, hardworking, and brilliant clinician with outstanding bedside diagnostic skills and great empathy for his patients. Around that time, the Swan-Ganz catheter was introduced into clinical medicine, and Kanu published several seminal papers on the hemodynamic spectrum in acute myocardial infarction and heart failure.

In 1975, Dr Chatterjee moved to the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) with his longtime friend and colleague, Bill Parmley, MD, who had also been at Cedars-Sinai at that time. He left behind many fond memories and a fantastic legacy. I (P.K.S.) was most fortunate to meet this remarkable human being at UCSF in late 1975. I wanted to work with him, but in his usual selfless manner, he felt that my professional interests would be better served at Cedars-Sinai because he felt that the cardiology department at UCSF at that time was not as developed as at Cedars-Sinai. I was always thankful to Kanu for that sage advice, which shaped my own career. I was personally honored to give the inaugural Docey and Kanu Chatterjee Lecture at the Annual Scientific Sessions of the American College of Cardiology (ACC) in 2014.

Kanu continued his distinguished clinical, teaching, and investigative career at UCSF, earning numerous accolades for his role as a bedside teacher and skilled clinician. His gentle bedside manner, together with phenomenal skill in examining the patient, taught the house staff about the critical information one can obtain from a well-directed history and superb physical examination. His calm approach to teaching never threatened the house staff or others. He had an uncanny knack of gently leading the presenting physician to a correct diagnosis and treatment plan. His reputation spread, and he saw many of the rich and famous throughout the country, in addition to many from the San Francisco area. Not only did Kanu work long hours at the hospital, but he made his home phone available to patients. The Chatterjee Center for Cardiac Research and the Kanu Chatterjee Resident Education Center at UCSF Medical Center were named after him.

In 2009, Dr Chatterjee retired and moved to Iowa City, Iowa, with his wife, Docey, an Iowa native. During his retirement, he was the attending physician on a busy inpatient service, with a weekly or twice-weekly clinic (highly sought by the cardiology fellows), with clinical activities comparable to full-time faculty. He was the first Kanu and Docey Edwards Chatterjee Chair in Cardiovascular Medicine at the University of Iowa College of Medicine, Iowa City, Iowa (D.H.).

Correspondence to Dr Prediman K. Shah, Cedars Sinai Heart Institute, Los Angeles, California. E-mail PredimanKrishan.Shah@cshs.org; Dr William Parmley, University of California, San Francisco, California. E-mail wwparmley@gmail.com; or Dr Donald Heistad, University of Iowa College of Medicine, Iowa City, Iowa. E-mail donald-heistad@uiowa.edu
(Circulation. 2015;131:2236-2237. DOI: 10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.115.017540.)
© 2015 American Heart Association, Inc.
Circulation is available at http://circ.ahajournals.org
DOI: 10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.115.017540
Shah et al. Remembering Kanu Chatterjee

Kanu Chatterjee was a prominent cardiologist and teacher who made significant contributions to the field of cardiology. He was also a mentor to many aspiring cardiologists. Despite his many professional achievements, he remained humble and focused on his patients and their care.

Kanu Chatterjee published over 300 papers and edited six books. He was a recipient of several prestigious awards, including the 2014 Herrick Award from the American Heart Association and the Presidential Honor for Excellence from the ACC. His contributions to cardiology include the development of vasodilator therapy for heart failure, defining the role of hemodynamic monitoring using the Swan-Ganz catheter in acute myocardial infarction and heart failure, and describing repolarization changes (cardiac memory) following cardiac pacing.

Several weeks before his death, a group of cardiology fellows visited Kanu at his residence. One of the fellows said that Kanu was one of the world’s greatest cardiologists. Kanu replied, “I have no regrets. I have had a full life.” A fellow said the moment was the most poignant, as the silence was deafening.

Dr. Chatterjee was 81 years old. He is survived by his wife of almost 40 years, Docey Edwards Chatterjee; his son, Suvendu Chatterjee, and daughter-in-law, Geetanjali, of Delaware; his grandson, Soumendu Chatterjee; and several siblings. As Samuel Johnson said about Oliver Goldsmith, “He touched nothing that he did not adorn.”

Reference

Remembering Kanu Chatterjee: A Gentle Giant of Cardiology
Prediman K. Shah, William Parmley and Donald Heistad

Circulation. 2015;131:2236-2237
doi: 10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.115.017540
Circulation is published by the American Heart Association, 7272 Greenville Avenue, Dallas, TX 75231
Copyright © 2015 American Heart Association, Inc. All rights reserved.
Print ISSN: 0009-7322. Online ISSN: 1524-4539

The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is located on the World Wide Web at:
http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/131/25/2236

Permissions: Requests for permissions to reproduce figures, tables, or portions of articles originally published in Circulation can be obtained via RightsLink, a service of the Copyright Clearance Center, not the Editorial Office. Once the online version of the published article for which permission is being requested is located, click Request Permissions in the middle column of the Web page under Services. Further information about this process is available in the Permissions and Rights Question and Answer document.

Reprints: Information about reprints can be found online at: http://www.lww.com/reprints

Subscriptions: Information about subscribing to Circulation is online at: http://circ.ahajournals.org//subscriptions/