

## OBITUARY

### A TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR SILAS R. A. DODU

*“There is No Cure for BIRTH OR DEATH Save to Enjoy the Interval”*

George Santayana 1863 – 1953, Spanish born Philosopher and Social Critic in Soliloquies in England Ward Shrines.

*“Life is Short and the Art is Long, the occasion fleeting, experience fallacious and judgement difficult. The Physician must not only be prepared to do what is right himself; but also to make the PATIENT THE ATTENDANTS AND EXTERNALS CO-OPERATE”.*

From the APHORISMS: ARS LONGA VITA BREVIS. Hippocrates 460 – 357 BC

The above quotes from Hippocrates of Cos 460 – 357 BC, the father of modern day medical practice, and George Santayana the Spanish born philosopher and social critic capture for us what living or human endeavour is all about. This tribute is paid in the context of the messages carried by the two astute observers.

There is little we can do about how we come here and very little, also, when we should leave here. But enjoying the interval is not just socialization and frolicking around. It is what in the interval you are able to achieve for yourself, family, community and directly, or vicariously for the nation and for your Maker. The achiever can then depart in peace, for a satisfactory job well-done. But in this particular instance, with Professor Dodu, affectionately called Silas who was a physician, did he live up to what was expected of him as a disciple of Hippocrates, the father of medicine?

The Ghana Medical Association wishes to record that he was a true and faithful disciple of Hippocrates who fulfilled his mandate. Professor Dodu met more than adequately the message in Santayana’s words of wisdom. And how?

Professor Dodu returned to Ghana in 1953 when he was already a Member of the Royal College of Physicians of London (MRCP Lond); by all accounts the first in Sub-Saharan black Africa. By his endeavour, he achieved the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians of London, this also a first as before. In between, he acquired the Doctor of Medicine (MD) post-graduate degree from his

alma mater, Sheffield University, for his work on Diabetes in Ghana. He rose to the Consultant status of the Physician Specialist grade; and again the first amongst Ghanaian Internist.

Very early on in his career, he had the vision of looking at so called “Whiteman’s” diseases, that is, Non-Communicable Disorders, such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension and heart attacks (coronary heart disease). These diseases are as a result of undesirable lifestyles and faulty health behaviour.. All these, within the context of overwhelming communicable diseases – diseases of hygiene, environmental sanitation, water borne vector borne diseases; and malnutrition. He would indicate in his expositions that these diseases would come to us much earlier than we or better still the health care givers thought at the time; and at that time and indeed until very recently the focus of the main health giver was perhaps, rightly on vaccine preventable diseases that impacted adversely on children, and on diseases that affected negatively safe motherhood. A false prophet Jeremiah? No! For within three decades of his earlier writings on these subjects, as we pay this tribute, hypertension or high blood pressure is epidemic; diabetes (sugar diseases) is certainly epidemic in urban Ghana; and heart attacks, a strong suggestion of being on the ascending curve of an epidemic. What a paradigm of perspicacity. He did not just predict, he also emphasized that the threat of these epidemics can be avoided, if only we pursue healthy lifestyles and do not indulge in negative health behaviour. These diseases were difficult to cure and costly to manage and were for life.

Hilary Beloc wrote about physicians with cynism thus: Physicians of utmost fame were called at once but when they came they answered as they took the fees “There is no cure for the disease.” Professor Dodu’s advocacy against these diseases, we suggest, allows him to plead Not Guilty: Mi Lord!

Professor Dodu did not only have the vision, he also sought to do something about it. He pursued this vision with missionary zeal. Thus the Mamprobi Cardiovascular Health Project and the Public Servants Hypertension Control Programme involving 60000 persons over 15 years in Mamprobi and

20000 Public Servants in Accra and Tema, that achieved international fame, made Accra a Mecca for many a Cardiovascular Epidemiologist. These studies would forever stand to his credit. He trained physicians with a view to carry on his mission. Professor J.O.M. Pobee and Professor E. B. Larbi were such beneficiaries of the scheme.

He was one of the Founders of the Ghana Medical Association, Ghana Medical School, later to become the University of Ghana Medical School, the West African College of Physicians and was also one of the first four National Vice Presidents of the latter College.

Professor Silas Dodu was the first Head of the Department of Medicine of University of Ghana Medical School, a Vice Dean and Dean also of the School. He joined the World Health Organization and held the post of Chief, Cardiovascular Diseases Unit in Geneva. A lot happened on his watch in the field of the epidemiology of cardiovascular disorders. Currently one of the projects he initiated, that is, Health Education of the Patient is still running under the directorship of Professor John Kpodonu.

From the point of view of the Ghana Medical Association founded in 1958, as mentioned earlier, he was a Founder with Professor Charles Easmon, Dr. Anum Barnor, Dr. Evans Anfom and Dr. Schandorf. He became the President of the Ghana Medical Association from 1966 – 1968. We recall in Silas, as Chairman of meetings of the Association (and the Medical School), the strict observance of punctuality, corrections to minutes that must be sent before the scheduled meeting so as to be available when minutes were being read; and if he could help it no meeting exceeding one hour!

We wish to recall two major events during his active membership of the Association. There was the abolition of private practice by the Government but, as now, the Association was right in the thick of the battle as it were for another acceptable salary scheme. In the end a Professional Allowance was given to compensate for the loss of private practice.

During the military interregnum of the Supreme Military Council, the Medical Association was right in the forefront of the activities of the Professional Bodies. At one GMA meeting at the auditorium of the University of Ghana Medical School (UGMS) at Korle Bu, held during the period when a strike action was contemplated, Silas cautioned

the Association “to hasten slowly” and to engage the authorities in a dialogue. The grumbling noises of protest after his intervention would have depressed a spineless individual but not him. He would make his point without fear or favour, dispassionately.

Soon after that meeting he went to London on the invitation of the Royal College of Physicians of London, to take part, for the first time, in a meeting on postgraduate training programme and evaluation methodologies by selected Fellows of the Royal College from the British Commonwealth. Incidentally about the same time Professor Emmanuel (Manny) Badoe, a long time friend of Professor Dodu, was in London taking part in the Specialist Examination of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, a first for any surgeon in Africa. That was the time of glory for Ghana when the Supreme Military Council I, chose the rather obtuse and illegal decision to sack “Professor Silas Dodu and Professor Manny Badoe from the service of the University!

For the first time in the history of Ghana, all the physicians, in generic terms and dental surgeons in Government or public health facilities, together with general practitioners embarked on a crippling strike that, mercifully, has not been seen since, and we hope never. The Government capitulated in next to no time, not knowing what had hit them.

Dear Fellows oh yes, we hear the question being whispered or crossing the minds of one listener; so had he no faults. Of course he had. But we humbly submit: “Be to his virtues very kind; Be to his faults a little blind” (Matthew Prior). So may he rest; his faults lie gently on him. (Shakespeare Henry VIII).

Today we mourn his transition to eternity. But also we are celebrating the rich and useful life of a great Ghanaian who by the evidence adduced above achieved greatness. He reached “the height not by sudden flight” but toiled upward in the night while his companions slept. (adopted from H.W. Longfellow’s *The Ladder of Augustine*).

Today the Ghana Medical Association mourns the home call of an icon of a physician who by the edicts of Santayana and Hippocrates, lived a life of high dedication and commitment in his service to human kind. Silas Dodu was a true and faithful disciple of Hippocrates of Cos of Ancient Greece.

We wish to extend to the family our deepest sorrow and condolences. Their loss is also our loss. A bright and shining star has fallen leaving a blazing trail.

Professor Silas Rofino Amo Dodu, the Ghana Medical Association of which you were a past president salute you on account of your being the mentor to many a physician, an excellent teacher, a very distinguished academician and an astute excellent clinician, an admirable researcher, and teacher and efficient administrator and a role

model. We are proud of you for having served well your family, compatriots and the nation.

May you enjoy eternal and peaceful rest now that you have crossed the River Beyond to settle in your ancestral home. May you comfortably rest in the warm bosom of our Father Abraham.

Professor Silas Dodu, *Requiescat in Pacem.*

***Ghana Medical Association***

