



Ralph George Hendrickse

Paediatrician and expert in tropical diseases. He was born on Nov 5, 1926, in Cape Town, South Africa, and he died at home in Heswall, UK, on May 5, 2010, aged 83 years.

Ralph Hendrickse, former Dean of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, in the UK, wrote the definitive thesis on sickle cell anaemia's clinical presentation in African children, showed the role of aflatoxins in kwashiorkor, and founded the journal *Annals of Tropical Paediatrics*. As professor of tropical paediatrics at Liverpool University he left, says his colleague Professor Bernard Brabin, "an enormous legacy for many doctors whose work and careers he promoted".

Hendrickse was born in Cape Town to a mixed race family that had emigrated to South Africa in the 18th century from Holland and Java. The son of a teacher, he entered the University of Cape Town Medical School when he was just 16 years old. Hendrickse was one of the first batch of "coloured" students to qualify MBChB in 1948. He came top of the class, despite having been excluded from clinical demonstrations when the patient was white. In South Africa at that time most clinical posts excluded non-white doctors: even government-run black hospitals had white ward sisters who did not take instructions from non-white doctors. Mission hospitals, however, had no such rule and Hendrickse spent 6 years at McCord Zulu Hospital in Durban. But his involvement in opposing apartheid led to police harassment and intimidation that eventually drove him overseas. He spent some time

living with his family in the UK and then, in 1956, he was appointed senior registrar at University College Hospital in Ibadan, Nigeria, which at that time was part of London University. Hendrickse became senior lecturer in 1958. A few years later, the now independent University of Ibadan appointed Hendrickse to establish and head up the new Institute of Child Health, which was located separately from the Department of Paediatrics.

Kwashiorkor was one of his main interests, and he was concerned that aflatoxins, which contaminated stored foods such as ground nuts and pulses, contributed to the condition. Hendrickse went on to show that they were a defining part of kwashiorkor. He found that kwashiorkor and exposure to aflatoxins had the same geographical and climatic prevalence, and that the biochemistry of kwashiorkor resembled that of animals with aflatoxin poisoning. Hendrickse also showed that children with kwashiorkor are less prone to severe falciparum malaria than children without the disease. He argued that aflatoxins, commonly present in the breastmilk of African women, explained the presence of kwashiorkor in breastfed babies, along with neonatal jaundice, perinatal death, and reduced birthweight. During his time in Nigeria, Hendrickse returned to the University of Cape Town for a year to write and submit an MD thesis on the presentation of sickle cell anaemia in African children. It became the classic work on the condition. Many years later the University of Cape Town awarded him their first honorary doctorate in paediatrics. He was also honorary consultant paediatrician at Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Liverpool, UK.

In 1969, Liverpool University recruited him to head a new Department of Tropical Paediatrics in the School of Tropical Medicine. Here he established a diploma course in tropical paediatrics and child health that attracted students from around the world. Jeddah paediatrician Hassan Badrek-Amoudi, one of his first batch of six students in 1970–72, remembers him as "a dedicated teacher with broad intellectual interests who was a great friend and will be missed by many". After Hendrickse's retirement in 1991, he continued to teach for many years until he was overtaken by Parkinsonism.

Hendrickse was an accomplished public speaker, never needing notes, and had a talent for composing topical verse and playing South African folk songs on the piano. In his last year of life a stroke left him paralysed on one side and aphasic. His beloved wife, Begum, died in December, 2009. He leaves five children—a psychiatry professor, two teachers, a dentist, and an actress—and several grandchildren. His family were with him when he died peacefully at home.

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