

## Tribute to Dr. Victor Stanley Blanchette



It is with much sadness that we report that, after a long and courageous struggle with an illness, our friend, colleague, and mentor Dr. Victor Stanley Blanchette passed away late on April 26, 2024.

Victor was truly a titan at the Hospital for Sick Children. In his 41 years of working at SickKids, he transformed paediatric haematology/oncology not only locally, but nationally and internationally as well.

Victor was born in 1945 in Barbados; the society and culture of Barbados greatly influenced him throughout his entire life. Seeing the tremendous disparity between the “haves” and “have-nots” whilst growing up in Barbados, Victor, throughout his life, always fought for the “have-nots”, i.e., the poor, the underprivileged, and the underdog.

At age 19, Victor moved to the United Kingdom to undertake his undergraduate medical education at Cambridge University. He did postgraduate training in London and became a member of the Royal College of Physicians of the United Kingdom. Whilst there he re-met Yvonne, who was training to become a nurse and who Victor knew from Barbados, and soon they married. Yvonne and Victor had a happy, fruitful, and long marriage having five children (their first daughter unfortunately passed away at a very young age) but their next four children, all boys, all flourished and more recently, allowed Victor to become a proud grandfather to 6 children. Unfortunately, Yvonne passed away tragically and much too early in 2022 after a brief illness.

In 1975, Victor, Yvonne and their family moved to Baltimore where Victor undertook a pediatric residency at John's Hopkins and 2 years later, he moved to Hamilton to do a fellowship in Paediatric Haematology/Oncology at McMaster University. It was there that he met Dr. Alvin Zipursky, who was to become his long-time mentor and life-long friend. After completion of his fellowship, Victor moved to Ottawa to take up a staff haematology position at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario with a cross appointment with the Canadian Red Cross. After 4 years in Ottawa, Victor was recruited by Dr. Zipursky (then Head of the Division of Haematology/Oncology at SickKids) in 1983 to lead the Haemophilia Clinic and Paediatric Haemostasis Program at SickKids.

From 1983 to 1998, Victor led the haemophilia program through the HIV crisis which had a devastating impact on children and men with haemophilia.

In those initial 15 years working in the Division of Haematology/Oncology, Victor began to be recognized for his vision, enthusiasm, and ability to inspire and lead local and national initiatives. He spearheaded pivotal national studies in immune thrombocytopenia (ITP), haemophilia, and other acquired/inherited bleeding disorders, and his vision led to the development of assessment tools that have become widely used in evaluating quality of life and musculoskeletal status in children with haemophilia. Nationally, he, along with Maureen Andrew, started the Canadian Paediatric Thrombosis and Haemostasis Network (CPTHN). He was instrumental in founding the Association of Hemophilia Clinic Directors of Canada (AHCDC), that is devoted to improving care of individuals with haemophilia and other bleeding disorders. Whilst undertaking all these activities, he published prolifically and by the end of his career had authored over 350 peer-reviewed publications.

In 1998, Victor was selected to be Chief of the Division of Haematology/Oncology. During his 12 years as Chief, he led the division through some turbulent times and dramatically transformed the division: the number of full-time faculty increased from 15 to 30 and the number of fellows training on a yearly basis increased dramatically. Victor was always enthusiastic about

educating and training the next generation. In this regard he, along with Maureen Andrew, in 2001, started a paediatric haemostasis/thrombosis training program. Victor was able to persuade industry sponsors to support an endowed fellowship in paediatric haemostasis/thrombosis. Over 50 trainees have trained at SickKids in this program, and many subsequently have gone on to lead/work in paediatric haemostasis and/or thrombosis programs throughout Canada and across the globe.

The growth in the division led to the establishment of subspecialty programs. Victor divided the division into 5 separate Sections, allowing division members to focus their clinical, education, and research activities. He saw the need to transform many aspects of paediatric haematology, including the training program. There had not been an accredited program in paediatric haematology/oncology. Victor successfully worked with the Royal College to develop an accredited Paediatric Haematology/Oncology Fellowship with a dedicated RCPSC examination. Victor recognized the need to bring paediatric haematology/oncology programs in Canada (large and small) together to form a collaborative organization to undertake multicenter studies. To do this, Victor, with other paediatric haematology/oncology Chiefs, established the Council of Canadian Paediatric Haematology/Oncology Directors, also referred to as C-17.

Internationally, Victor's achievements were equally amazing. In the late 1990s, he was a founding member of the Intercontinental ITP Study Group (ICIS). In 2001, Victor established the International Prophylaxis Study Group (IPSG) and became its inaugural chair and, until recently, its only chair. He worked to help develop and support haemophilia programs all over the world, in China, Thailand, Brazil, and most of all, in various Caribbean Islands including the island of his birth - Barbados. Additionally, and most recently, his passion for the less well-off led him along with other colleagues at SickKids to develop the SickKids-Caribbean Pediatric Cancer and Blood Disorders Initiative (SCI) with the aim of improving the care of children with cancer and hematological disorders in these countries.

Victor was a sought-after invited speaker all over the world. One of his favorite places to present lectures was Edinburgh, where he was a faculty member of a distinguished Haemophilia Academy. This Academy provided an annual intensive training course for aspiring fellows wishing to enter the field of haemostasis.

Victor's accomplishments have been recognized with prestigious awards, including the:

- Cecil Harris Award from the Canadian Haemophilia Society (2006)
- Hospital for Sick Children Richard Rowe Award for Clinical Excellence (2008)
- Alan Ross Award from the Canadian Paediatric Society (2009)

- Canadian Blood Services Lifetime Achievement Award (2010)
- American Society of Pediatric Hematology Oncology Distinguished Career Award (2012)
- University of the West Indies (UWI) Toronto Benefit Gala Vice-Chancellor's Award (2018)
- Hemostasis and Thrombosis Research Society (HTRS) Lifetime Achievement Award (2019), and most importantly,
- The Order of Barbados (2017)

Awards that now bear his name are the:

- Hospital for Sick Children Victor Blanchette Award for Paediatric Haematology/Oncology fellows showing overall excellence, and the
- CPTHN Victor Blanchette Award for excellence in paediatric haemostasis research, education, and clinical work nationally.

After stepping down from being Chief of Paediatric Haematology/Oncology, Victor continued as Section Head of Haematology, and as medical director of the Paediatric Thrombosis and Haemostasis program as well as co-director of the Haemophilia Clinic. The latter, he shared with Dr. Manuel Carcao, who initially had trained with Victor.

All his countless accomplishments stem from the man that Victor was: a caring, compassionate, and good-natured individual who never yelled but instead befriended, inspired, and persuaded others to do good and important things. He never thought that something was unachievable. Victor worked tirelessly to achieve what many thought would be impossible. "No" was never part of his vocabulary – instead "Yes" was his favourite word.

Victor was also someone who always cared deeply for his patients, his trainees, his colleagues, and most of all his family. He assisted all who came to him, providing guidance and inspiration. Some of his patients became his students, and many of his trainees became his colleagues. Trainees would come from all over the world to train with Victor and even when it looked impossible for them to be able to come (for lack of funding), Victor somehow managed to secure funding for them. Consequently, Victor inspired loyalty and friendship. He trained so many who are now leading programs all over the world and who will always look fondly to the significant role that he played in their lives. Despite his tremendous accomplishments, he remained humble and modest.

The last few years of his life were not easy for Victor – dealing with illness, with great losses: his beloved wife Yvonne, and his mentor and friend Alvin Zipursky. Despite that, Victor, having given up clinical work, continued his research, educational, and advocacy work and continued to fight for the underdog.

Victor's journey from the tiny island of Barbados to Canada via many other places is finally over, and no longer will he fly all over the world, fighting to improve paediatric haematology/ oncology. You can finally slow down, Victor! You will be greatly missed by the entire Hospital for Sick Children community and by the world at large.

Rest in peace – our mentor, colleague, and friend.

Manuel Carcao, Margaret Rand, Ann Marie Stain, Vanessa Bouskill, Audrey Abad, Melanie Kirby and Sheila Weitzman (on behalf of all his colleagues, fellows, nurses, and friends)