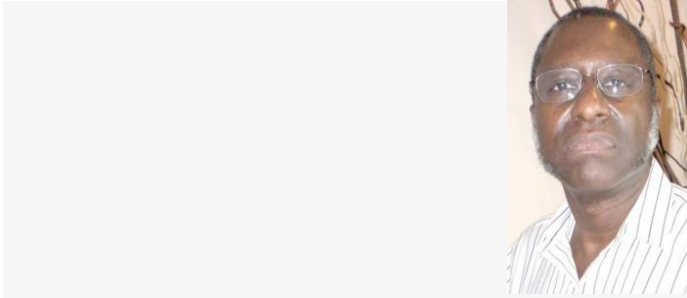


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MARCH 6, 2016 | BY KNEWS | FILED UNDER NEWS By Sharmain Grainger

"If you care enough about people (as a medical practitioner) then you will want to have as much knowledge about what you are doing so that you can help them even more."



Dr. Frank Denbow

Anyone who ventures into the field of medicine primarily because of his or her love for humanity is definitely an individual worthy of recognition. It is for this reason that we have chosen Dr. Frank Denbow, a well-respected medical practitioner for many years, to be this week's 'Special Person'.

Although he migrated to the United States several years ago, currently practices as an Internist and is very involved in things cardiology in New Jersey, United States, Dr. Denbow has a keen interest in Guyana. And this is with good reason too, since he is a Guyanese by birth, and one who offered years of medical service to his homeland before migrating, and continues to find ways to do so.

A PASSION TO GIVE BACK TO GUYANA

Because of his passion to give back to Guyana and simultaneously aid its development, Dr. Denbow, even while toiling in another land, was busy conceptualizing an idea. The idea which was brought to fruition, with the support of friends, in January of 2014, took the form of the Guyana-Jamaica Friendship Association (GJFA).

The intent of the GJFA, among other things, is to lend support to two crucial areas – health and education – in both Guyana and Jamaica.

While Dr. Denbow has had a passion for health for many years, he had long recognized that education is of equal importance, since it has the potential of elevating even the most vulnerable among us. Moreover, he disclosed, during a recent interview, that the vision of GJFA is basically to help make a difference in health and education.

Explaining the premise for the organization he founded, Dr. Denbow said that a primary target, for both health and education in the two target territories, is deprived communities.



In the company of his cousins. Standing from left: Dr. Claude Denbow, Dr. Frank Denbow, Professor Charles Denbow, Retired Guyana Airways Captain, Rev. Louis Crawford, Retired Col. Fairbairn Liverpool. Seated from left: Mrs. Roderine Moses, Dr. Louise Liverpool-Grant and Dr. Sarah Crawford-Gordon.

“In health, we are focusing on poverty-stricken rural areas to try to improve the health of the residents there as much as possible, and as it relates to education, we want to focus on one primary school and make it the best it can be, so that others can look at our model, copy or even improve it, so that everywhere else can be better,” a passionate Dr. Denbow related. Currently the Association has its health focus in Guyana on areas in Region Two including Suddie, Supenaam and Anna Regina, while in Jamaica, St. Thomas has been chosen. With regards to education, two schools have been adopted by the Association – Mashabo Primary on the Essequibo Coast and the Aeolus Valley School in St. Thomas, Jamaica. But a key focus of Dr. Denbow’s GJFA, is the advancement of medical professionals to ensure that they are well equipped with the necessary knowledge to cater to the needs of those they are tasked with providing health care to.

CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION

Since entering the medical profession many years ago, Dr. Denbow embraced the notion of Continuing Medical Education (CME). And according to him, “the more knowledge you have; the more help you can give to people. So Continuing Medical Education is a passion of mine...If you care enough about people (as a medical practitioner) then you will want to have as much knowledge about what you are doing so that you can help them even more”. Soon after completing his medical studies overseas and returning to Guyana in 1988 to practice at the Georgetown Public Hospital, he was thrust into the executive realm of the Guyana Medical Association as Vice President in charge of CME.



Top Common Entrance performers in 1967. From left: Deryck Archer, Malcolm McDonald, Frank Denbow and Horace Nunes

Reflecting on the humble beginnings of the Association, Dr. Denbow recalled sessions being conducted in a meagre space for about 25 people below the medical library of the hospital. But CME sessions here have evolved, and Dr. Denbow is still playing a major role. Through GJFA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health, he was recently able to spearhead a CME session at the Arthur Chung Convention Centre, catering to close to 200 medical practitioners. With a sense of pride, he stated that health care in Guyana has come a long way.

Dr. Denbow confided that it was the inability of the local health sector to offer some services that led to his migration from these shores. He left for the United States in 1991 to be with his wife and child. Although his passion was always to serve his country, he disclosed that his wife was at the time suffering from a very complex condition and not even he could have helped. Her condition required the expertise of specialists who, at the time, could only be found overseas.

“Quite frankly the reason I left in 1991 is that...both of us felt, and we still do to this day, that if she had stayed she would have died. My wife was scared and had to be in the US to get the kind of health care to live, and we had a five-year old at the time...it was a situation where I felt obligated to be with my family,” he intimated.

But he always had a fervent desire to see health care advance in Guyana. This passion enveloped him as did his aspiration to become a doctor from a very young age.



Dr. Denbow handing over a book to a pupil of Moshabo Primary during a recent GJFA outreach.

EMBRACING A PROFESSION

I don't know too many people who aspire to embrace a particular profession at a very young age and grow up to be just that, but this was in fact the case for Dr. Denbow. From as early as the age of 10, he decided on his career path. This of course was not a very difficult decision for him, since he grew up observing his mother, the illustrious Dr. Enid Denbow, looking very smart with her stethoscope and medical bag.

Dr. Enid Denbow boasts an impressive medical résumé. From serving as a nurse with distinction, she later expanded her horizon and pursued studies in Medicine. Especially significant during her career was her appointment as the first and only female Chief Medical Officer within the Health Ministry for several years.

Young Frank, in essence, had an ideal role model to fashion his life after.

As he reminisced on his own journey to becoming a doctor, he seemed incapable of

containing his thoughts about his mother.

“My mother is just an amazing person and she continues to inspire me,” he asserted. He recalled that even at a tender age he was inspired by the fact that she was helping to save lives, and he too wanted such a forte.

“There is a picture of me when I was four and a half years old with my mother’s medical bag, and from ever since I can remember myself, that’s all I wanted to be. I just wanted to be a doctor,” he related.

In fact, long before he stepped into a classroom to commence his medical studies, he was nicknamed ‘Dr. Denbow’ by his friends.

“I remembered playing cricket with my friends on the (Merriman) Mall outside Bourda and all of them would call me ‘Dr. Denbow’. I was just 10 years old, but it was just something I wanted to do.”

Perhaps his friends were just as confident as he was that he had the potential to become a doctor. Years later it wasn’t at all surprising that a pretend boyhood career had morphed into reality.

PREPARATION FOR THE TASK

Born to the late Frank Denbow A.A, a Trade Unionist and national football player, and Dr. Enid Denbow, at Lot 5 Camp Street, Georgetown on October 8, 1956, Frank Jr. grew up at Church Street, Queenstown, Georgetown. His mother still resides at that location effectively making it a Denbow domicile for half of a decade this year.



Our ‘Special Person’ attending to a patient

As a young boy he attended St. Ambrose Primary School at Third and Light Streets, Alberttown and was one of four boys from that school who passed for Queen’s College (QC) in 1967. Passing along with him were: Deryck Archer, Malcolm McDonald and Horace Nunes.

He attended QC from 1967-1974 during which he was a very competitive cricketer and was named captain of Nobbs House. He recalled playing for the school’s under-16 cricket team and disclosed that his team was named runner-up in the House Cricket Competition in 1973. Dr. Denbow reflected that he was well prepared during his secondary years to take on the role he is now tasked with. He qualified this assertion by noting that “I went to QC for seven years and I never won a single academic prize, but when people look at my academic career after QC they are astounded that I never won an academic prize, but I tell you the reason for that is because at QC I met the brightest people in my life.”

His boyhood dream ultimately came true when he graduated from medical school in 1981 from Queen’s University of Belfast in the United Kingdom.

He did his post graduate training in both the UK and Jamaica. In fact he resided in Jamaica for a period of five years (1983-1988) after which he returned to Guyana.

He attained Membership of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom in 1989

and later went on to become the first Black Chief Resident of Internal Medicine at the Newark Beth Israel Medical Center in New Jersey.

While in Guyana he offered his service at the Georgetown Public Hospital, the Davis Memorial Hospital and the Medical Heart Centre. He also lectured for a period at the University of Guyana all before his decision to migrate.

CONTINUED MISSION

Dr. Denbow was compelled to duly recognise that he hasn't been the only one in his family since his mother to venture into the medical field and excel. Several of his cousins have been and are reputable figures in the medical field, including Dr. Claude Denbow, Professor Charles Denbow, Dr. Louise Liverpool-Grant and Dr. Sarah Crawford-Gordon.

But now, his continued mission continues to be to help make a difference in his homeland, and this goal, he believes, is being attained through the GJFA.

"What it taught me is not how bright you are, but if you have the right support structure you can achieve anything," Dr. Denbow emphasised.

It was with this notion in mind, he disclosed, that GJFA was created.

"I look at those kids in Mashabo, those little indigenous kids, and I say to myself if there is a little girl there who has a role model who has achieved great heights, she will believe that she could also achieve. What we have to do is to make them believe that they are somebody who can achieve and once you do that all sorts of things can happen."