

OBITUARIES DESK: 416-585-5500
 FAX: 416-585-5691
 OBIT@GLOBEANDMAIL.COM
 DEATH NOTICES: 416-585-5111

Obituaries

SUSAN KING, 54 » PHYSICIAN

Sick Kids doctor a pioneer in pediatric HIV research

Her work resulted in a decrease in the rate of transmission of the AIDS virus and a movement to support affected families

BY NOREEN SHANAHAN

As a physician at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Susan King put Canadian pediatric HIV research on the map. She brought attention to HIV/AIDS as a threat to children and to the importance of prenatal screening.

As a result of her work and commitment, the rate of transmission for the human immunodeficiency virus fell dramatically and efforts to stem the disease, and support the families, grew into a movement.

"Pediatric HIV infection was a neglected part of the whole HIV/AIDS spectrum," Dr. King said in an interview with The Toronto Star. "People didn't want to talk about it. There was just such a huge stigma attached to it that I felt like I had to become an advocate for those who couldn't or wouldn't speak for themselves."

The unspeakable began to be discussed. People started asking excruciating questions such as: How can infected children psychologically prepare for their future? Who cares for the family when a parent becomes too ill? When time is limited, how is it best spent?

"Women need to know that [screening] is an easy test to do and that if the test comes back positive, there is almost total prevention of transmission of HIV to their baby," Dr. King said.

Babies can become infected in the womb, during delivery or from breast milk produced by HIV-positive mothers. Doctors can dramatically reduce the mother's viral load if drug treatment is started by the second trimester.

Sometimes the baby is delivered by cesarean section to prevent HIV transmission during birth. The baby is also given drugs for several months afterward.

Dr. King found that many infected women were immigrants who feared that public exposure would jeopardize their status or that the stigma would shrink their often shaky sense of security. As well as advocating for testing, she worked to reassure these women and establish quality care for children.

Dr. King was a founding member of the Teresa Group, Canada's oldest community-based charitable organization specifically serving children affected by HIV/AIDS and their families. She also supported the Philip Aziz Centre, a hospice serving a large portion of women and children



Susan King was a founding member of the Teresa Group, Canada's oldest community-based charitable organization specifically serving children affected by HIV/AIDS.

in Toronto.

Next year, the centre is to open the first Children's Respite Home, which will assist families living with HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening illnesses. Organizers are planning the Susan King Family Room in her honour.

Susan King was born in Edinburgh to Anne and Owen King. Her mother was Scottish and her father was born on St. Lucia. She and her siblings spent their childhood shuttling from one country to the other. Her father was the head of medicine for St. Lucia

and probably fostered her early interest in math and sciences, as well as celebrating her academic excellence.

"I saw the school [Susan] went to, and it's really quite phenomenal. It's this open-air school where they use slate boards," said Gwen Binsfeld, a friend of Dr. King's who vacationed in St. Lucia with her.

The all-girls convent schools Dr. King attended in St. Lucia did not teach math to girls, so her mother transferred her to a boys school, where she was the only girl. At 15, she won an Island Scholarship to Ox-

ford University. She graduated in 1973 with a bachelor of arts degree in sciences.

She worked as a research assistant in the department of anesthesia at Memorial University of Newfoundland. While there, she met and fell in love with a fellow student, Richard Seary.

In 1975, she started medical school at McGill University in Montreal.

Dr. King and Dr. Seary were married in Toronto seven years after they met, once she had graduated from McGill (also taking time to receive a

Pediatric HIV infection was a neglected part of the whole HIV/AIDS spectrum.

... There was just such a huge stigma attached to it that I felt like I had to become an advocate for those who couldn't or wouldn't speak for themselves.

Women need to know that [screening] is an easy test to do and that if the test comes back positive, there is almost total prevention of transmission of HIV to their baby.

master's degree in chemistry at Oxford in 1977).

Dr. King became chief resident at the Hospital for Sick Children in 1980 and began her pediatric training. Eight years later, she joined the department of pediatrics while completing a second master's degree in clinical epidemiology at McMaster University. Meanwhile, she had three daughters in four years.

"When she gave birth to her second child, Mary Elizabeth," Ms. Binsfeld said, "the child was hours old and Susan was there with her laptop on her belly. I mean she'd pop these kids out like toast in a toaster and then be back up and running in no time flat."

Where did she gather such extraordinary energy and commitment? According to Ms. Binsfeld, her friend strove for excellence early on. "Because she was a female of mixed blood in a generation where that was frowned upon, going to different countries and not being black, not being white ... and this thing about going to a boys school when you were a girl ... and being really young when everybody else was older, she was a fish out of water, al-

ways, so she buried herself in her academics and her books."

Dr. King first gained public notice in 1993 for a study she conducted at the Hospital for Sick Children providing an estimate of the incidence of HIV in relation to blood transfusions. Controversial at the time, this form of notification and discussion of HIV risk with patients has become the norm in Canada.

Another initiative in the fight against pediatric HIV/AIDS was the Motherisk Program, begun in 1997 at the Hospital for Sick Children. The program provides free, confidential counselling about the risk of HIV infection and HIV treatment during pregnancy. In 1998, Dr. King became director of the HIV/AIDS Comprehensive Care Program, as well as teaching pediatrics in a joint program with the hospital and the University of Toronto.

"When I entered medicine, I chose pediatrics because children would have the potential for many years of benefit from my work," she said. "I then chose infectious diseases as a subspecialty because most infections could be cured."

Since initially little was known about HIV, Dr. King said she learned as much from families as she did from scientific journals. "This work has allowed me to have a very special relationship with many families and communities," she said.

In 2004, Dr. King was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease), a slow deterioration of the body. But even while her body seized, she continued working, thanks to progressive mobility devices and communication technology.

Toward the end of her life, Dr. King was asked to be included in *Canadian Who's Who*. She gave the invitation a great deal of thought.

"At first, I was going to decline," she said, "but when I looked in the book, I saw that very few women were represented, so I agreed to their invitation."

SUSAN KING

Susan King was born on April 5, 1954, in Edinburgh and died on Feb. 15, 2009, in Toronto of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. She was 54. She leaves her husband, Richard Seary, and her daughters, Judith, Elizabeth and Alison. She also leaves her parents, Owen and Anne King, and her siblings, Jane, Stephen, Alison and Mandy.

» Special to The Globe and Mail

VALENTIN VARENNIKOV, 85 » SOVIET GENERAL

Hard-liner was 'hatchet man' in the coup against Gorbachev

He went to prison, was tried and acquitted, then went on to a political career

BY VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV MOSCOW

Retired General Valentin Varennikov was a hawkish Second World War veteran who directed the Soviet war in Afghanistan and joined the



They were too naive, not firm enough.

dent Vladimir Putin."

The attempted coup began on a Sunday afternoon as Gen. Varennikov marched into Mr. Gorbachev's summer home in Crimea and announced that a

on the support Mr. Yeltsin was able to mobilize - from the public, from within the military, and even from sympathetic KGB agents - and they had not reckoned on the weakness