Kanu Chatterjee, MD

(1934–2015)

Dr. Kanu Chatterjee passed away on 4 March 2015 in Iowa City, Iowa, at 81 years of age.

He was born in Bangladesh in 1934. He received his medical degree from R.G. Kar Medical College in Calcutta, while living in a refugee camp. His subsequent training in internal medicine and cardiology was in London, at St. George's Hospital and the Royal Brompton. In 1970, he was recruited to join the cardiology division at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, to direct the coronary care unit and the Myocardial Infarction Research Unit (the MIRU, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health). It was during this period that the Swan-Ganz catheter was introduced into clinical practice at Cedars-Sinai, and then worldwide. Dr. Chatterjee and his colleagues wrote several leading papers on the hemodynamic alterations that occur in patients who experience acute myocardial infarctions and heart failure.

In 1975, Dr. Chatterjee moved to the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) with his friend and colleague, Dr. William Parmley. There, he was named Director of the Cardiac Care Unit and Associate Chief of Cardiology. He spent most of his subsequent career in a close and very productive partnership with Dr. Parmley, as they developed one of the foremost cardiac units in the world.

Dr. Chatterjee's clinical skills in diagnosing cardiovascular diseases at the bedside were well known by leading cardiologists, by students who wished to learn from him, and by patients who came from everywhere to receive his help. A research center at UCSF was named in his honor: the University of California Chatterjee Center for Cardiac Research. He was also named the University's Gallo-Kanu Chatterjee Distinguished Professor in Clinical Cardiology at UCSF.

However, there was even more that made Kanu Chatterjee a very special man. Dr. William Grossman, former Distinguished Professor and Chief of Cardiology at UCSF, described Dr. Chatterjee as "a saintly man." Grossman said, "He transmits calm and spiritual peace to his patients. They believe they have been improved by having been in his presence." Dr. Grossman also shared a story about Dr. Chatterjee that indicated his selflessness and generosity. When an affluent patient wished to endow a chair at UCSF in his honor, Dr. Chatterjee asked that the gift be given, instead, to support one of the young cardiology faculty members who was early in his career. Indeed, Dr. Chatterjee often directed philanthropic gifts and awards to residents, fellows, and colleagues at UCSF.

I knew Dr. Chatterjee to be a supporter of everyone in cardiovascular medicine who worked to educate others and to find new knowledge that helped improve the lives of patients. He was kind, selfless, very hard working, wise, and—along with his

Kanu Chatterjee, MD

Photo provided by University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, Department of Internal Medicine.

friend, Dr. Parmley—the heart and soul of cardiovascular medicine at UCSF.

He “retired” in 2009 and moved to his wife Docey’s home state of Iowa, resuming his teaching and clinical career at the University of Iowa Medical Center, as the first Kanu and Docey Edwards Chatterjee Chair in Cardiovascular Medicine.

He received many awards during his very distinguished career. I suspect that the one he was most proud of was the James B. Herrick Award (2014) from the American Heart Association, that organization’s highest honor in clinical cardiology.

The world will not soon see another Kanu Chatterjee.

*James T. Willerson, MD,
President, Texas Heart Institute; and
Editor-in-Chief, Texas Heart Institute Journal,
Houston*