CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Michael Parkin—an international paediatrician

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The unexpected death of Professor Michael Parkin is a blow for the international links of British paediatrics. Michael stood for the best in internationalism: friendship, support for those in need, and the teaching of clinical excellence. There were four ways in which he promoted contacts between the United Kingdom and developing countries, and it is worth describing each one as examples to others.

The first was a bilateral link sponsored by the British Council between the University of Khartoum, Sudan, and the department of child health in Newcastle upon Tyne. The purpose of this link was to foster postgraduate teaching in Khartoum. Teachers would go out to the Sudan from Northern regional centres for two to three weeks every year to strengthen teaching and research for future Sudanese paediatricians in areas of weakness, while trainees would come to Newcastle for several months to improve their skills in specific subspecialties. Michael himself went to Khartoum every year and saw the link as a unique form of support for the child health service of a very poor (and war torn) developing country.

A second important contribution was his association with the Dunn Nutrition Unit in The Gambia. Michael joined the MRC Child Nutrition Unit in Makerere, Uganda in 1968 at the encouragement of Donald Court and there pioneered the use of prospective longitudinal studies to look at nutritional, anthropometric, and neurodevelopmental outcome. The unit was re-established in The Gambia in 1972 and a close and enduring association with the MRC Dunn Nutrition Unit in Cambridge followed: Michael ensured that a succession of young paediatricians from the department of child health in Newcastle followed him to be project leaders and resident medical officers in the Dunn’s Research Station in Keneba.

The third link was the yearly visit to Newcastle of the postgraduates from the MSc course in maternal and child health at the Trop-