

Professor Nelson Awori (1934-1986)

Professor Nelson Awori (1934-1986) was a urological surgeon, researcher and senior lecturer in general surgery. He carried out the first successful kidney transplant in Kenya on a young girl named Kokoin in 1978 who went on to live a healthy adult life. Throughout his career, Awori was concerned to right the medical injustices that had begun in Kenya during the colonial period. He approached this through both research and teaching. He was the first person to establish that Ulcerative Colitis occurs in Kenyan Africans. It is a debilitating disease which had previously been described as a not affecting Africans thus preventing life enhancing treatment. He also carried out research on renal tumours, retroperitoneal fibrosis, renal stones and renal failure in order to shed light on conditions that had previously been undiagnosed in Africans. Awori also carried out comparative work on urological conditions aetiology and occurrence in Africa, Europe and the USA. Awori also recognised serious inequalities in medical provision in Kenya that saw District and Provincial hospitals with far fewer specialists than in the capital city Nairobi. To that end, he extended both undergraduate and post-graduate teaching to include practical work in these hospitals to increase their capacity in treating patients in rural areas. His untimely death in a road traffic accident meant that he did not fulfil all the ambitions he had to improve medical care in Kenya and Uganda. He left behind a thriving Urology Department at the University of Nairobi which continues to offer training and transplant services to date.

Professor Nelson Awori was the son of Canon Jeremiah Awori the first Luyia Anglican clergyman in what was known as British East Africa (now Kenya and Uganda) and Mariamu Olubo Odongo who came from a ruling lineage amongst the Samia people. Awori displayed his potential in surgery during his teenage years when he stitched together a cow belonging to the family that had ripped open its abdomen along a barbed wire fence. The cow survived and went on to have calves. Awori initially received his medical training in British East Africa graduating in 1961 before being awarded the Diploma of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in London in 1964. He was awarded Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh in 1968.

Dr JC Niala, Head of Research, Teaching & Collections at the History of Science Museum
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