

Manto Tshabalala-Msimang

South Africa's health minister who advocated beetroot as treatment for AIDS

SCHALK VAN ZUYDAM/AP/PA IMAGES



Instead of antiretrovirals she advocated virodene, a lethal industrial solvent discredited scientifically for treating AIDS



South Africa's controversial former health minister between 1999 and 2008, Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, known with derision as Dr Beetroot, has died. She obstructed AIDS treatment that might have prevented at least 330 000 unnecessary deaths (*Acquir Immune Defic Syndr* 2008;49:410-5).

Having gone into exile with her friend the former South African president Thabo Mbeki in 1962, she studied medicine, qualifying in 1969 in what was then Leningrad. She was caught stealing from patients while working at a hospital in Botswana; was tried and convicted and struck off the register. Mbeki conceded later when it became public that as president he had appointed her as health minister in 1999 knowing her background.

Her nickname, Dr Beetroot, arose from her suggestion that beetroot, garlic, olive oil, and lemon, and African potato were more use than antiretroviral drugs. This was seized on by her critics and used remorselessly, and caused her and President Mbeki much damage internationally. Outrageously, the South African stall at the 2006 international AIDS conference in Toronto was decorated with vegetables. It drew the minister scathing criticism, for example, from Stephen Lewis, the United Nations special envoy on AIDS, who described her as "obtuse, dilatory, and negligent" and the government's views as belonging to a lunatic fringe.

By 1999 when Mbeki became president the number of HIV positive people in the country had reached five million. Early in his presidency, Mbeki

did not accept that HIV caused AIDS. Although this was not government policy few in the cabinet contested him. Tshabalala-Msimang had not initially shared these doubts, but as Mbeki's health minister she enacted his views.

She initially enthused about the antiretroviral drug nevirapine to prevent vertical transmission of the virus and was offered the drug free by Boehringer Ingelheim, but she refused it to women who needed it, even after an order from the Constitutional Court. While policy was to offer antiretrovirals to victims of rape, she also saw to it that doctors who gave the prophylaxis were dismissed.

Instead of antiretrovirals Tshabalala-Msimang advocated virodene, a lethal industrial solvent discredited scientifically for treating AIDS, with which the African National Congress hoped to make money. She was criticised for cooperation with trials of virodene on soldiers in Tanzania, after the South African regulator refused to allow trials. And she pushed Matthias Rath's vitamin supplements, until a court stopped their sale (*BMJ* 2008;336:1458).

She got rid of the head of the Medicines Control Council, Helen Rees, who did not support the government's attempt to "get rid of AZT." Zidovudine (azidothymidine, AZT) was the blockbuster antiretroviral made by Glaxo, which the government touted as being more dangerous than AIDS. The drug stayed on the market, however.

She did other damage during her nine year tenure. Public hospitals, clinics, and equipment fell

into disrepair. Combined with large inefficiencies, incompetence, and corruption (all described in parliament by the current health minister, Aaron Motsoaledi) many hospitals and clinics failed to provide necessary services and were often without water, electricity, and telephones. Drugs often ran out. Nursing staff, underskilled and unwilling to work, went undisciplined, as did doctors who failed to turn up to work.

This showed in the markers of the health of a country: maternal, infant, and child health became worse than during apartheid. South Africa was one of only 12 countries that went backwards, according to the 2008 Unicef report on progress towards the 2015 millennium goals.

Official reports were suppressed for a time while a process of whitewashing took place. But when her deputy minister confirmed the catastrophe, Tshabalala-Msimang was dismissed, in 2008.

At her funeral, President Jacob Zuma paid tribute to the 1500 clinics built during her tenure. Despite her shortcomings she was popular in the African National Congress, and she polled high enough in the party to continue to hold power and credibility there after being sacked.

She placed her loyalty to the party and to Mbeki above all else, according to Patrick Masobe, former chief executive of the statutory regulator of private health insurance. "She was ill served by her senior staff. She could be very warm, but there were days when she was very difficult to work with. Her main weakness was seeing everything through political lenses," he said.

Two years ago confidential medical records fell into the hands of the South African *Sunday Times*, leading to the headline "Manto: a drunk and a thief" (16 August 2007). They showed nightly partying and staff ordered to get her alcohol.

Tshabalala-Msimang died while waiting for a second liver transplant. Her first was in 2007, and led to accusations that she had jumped organ donor queues, was too old, and had damaged her own health by drinking heavily. Her harshest critics were among AIDS activists.

She leaves a second husband, Mendi Msimang, who was the African National Congress's treasurer general, and two daughters from her first marriage.

Pat Sidley

Mantombazana "Manto" Edmie Tshabalala-Msimang (née Mali), former health minister of South Africa (b 1940; q 1969, First Leningrad Graduate Institute of Medicine) died 16 December 2009 from complications with her transplanted liver.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c127

Stanley Bernard Cohen



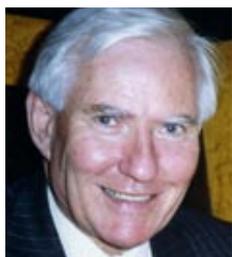
Former consultant physician Walton and University Hospitals, Aintree, Liverpool (b 1938; q Liverpool 1961; MD, FRCP), died from cryptogenic hepatic fibrosis on 20 October 2009.

After qualification, Stanley Bernard Cohen (“Bernard”) undertook a wide-ranging apprenticeship at various hospitals around the north of England. He spent 15 months in Baltimore, Maryland, completing his MD on familial polyposis coli under Victor McKusick. He returned to the United Kingdom in 1975 to take up his consultancy in general medicine and diabetes, with an interest in maternity medicine. Widely regarded as one of nature’s gentlemen, Bernard became increasingly interested in undergraduate education, and was still teaching a year before his death. He loved classical music, and attended music classes in his retirement. He leaves a wife, Alison, and three sons.

Stuart Cohen

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c155

Brian Patrick Dillon



Former consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist Barnet General and Finchley Memorial Hospitals, London (b 1930; q St Mary’s Hospital, London, 1957; FRCS Glas, FRCOG), died from complications of prostatic cancer on 8 September 2008.

Brian Patrick Dillon was commissioned in the Coldstream Guards, serving with distinction in Malaya. At medical school he

played in winning United Hospitals Cup teams in cricket and rugby. On qualification he worked in Singapore before specialising in London. After two years in Africa and a senior registrarship at St George’s Hospital, London, he became consultant to the Barnet Hospital Group until his retirement in 1995. He was a pioneer of “water birthing” in the United Kingdom. He leaves a wife, Linda; two daughters; and three granddaughters.

Michael Dillon, Tom King

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c159

Ghassan Hanna



Consultant ear, nose, and throat surgeon Hereford (b 1949; q Cairo 1973; FRCS), died from a heart attack on 13 June 2009.

Born into a Christian family in Palestine, Ghassan Hanna left home during the 1967 six day war to become a doctor. After graduation with honours and house jobs in Cairo, he worked in Dubai for five years but hoped to return to work in Palestine after gaining his FRCS in 1980. However, politically, he was then no longer considered a Palestinian citizen and therefore made Britain his home. In 1987 he became consultant in Hereford. He was the lead head and neck cancer specialist and paediatric ENT surgeon for Hereford, and had a special interest in rhinology. He leaves a wife, Wafa; four children; and a grandchild.

Una Hanna, Sally Hanna

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c169

Charles James Frederick Maguire

Former consultant ophthalmic surgeon Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast (b 1931 q Queen’s University, Belfast, 1954), d 7 July 2009.

After qualification, Charles James Frederick Maguire trained as an



ophthalmic surgeon at Moorfields Eye Hospital, London, and was appointed ophthalmic surgeon in Belfast in 1967. He developed the subspecialty of vitreoretinal surgery and launched neuro-ophthalmic and diabetic eye clinics. An expert, innovative, and meticulous surgeon, Charles introduced new techniques in vitreoretinal surgery and laser photocoagulation. He was senior lecturer at the Queen’s University Medical School for a decade, and helped to develop ophthalmic services in India and Libya. After retirement from the NHS in 1994, he practised ophthalmology in Bermuda. He leaves a wife, Barbara; three children by his first wife, Ann; and a grandson.

Desmond Archer

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c158

David Mattingly



Former consultant in diabetes and endocrinology and professor of postgraduate medical studies, Exeter (b 1922; q St Thomas’s Hospital, London, 1953; FRCP, Hon FRCGP), died from complications of myelodysplasia on 14 March 2009.

During the second world war, David Mattingly joined the Friends’ Ambulance Unit (1940-2) and the Royal Air Force (1942-7), becoming staff navigation officer. Afterwards his twin brother, Stephen, already a doctor, persuaded him to study medicine instead of electrical engineering. In 1962 David wrote his most cited paper on fluorimetric measurement of plasma corticosteroids—the “Mattingly

method.” He was the first director of the Postgraduate Medical Institute, Exeter, and held the first medical chair (1973). He co-authored *Bedside Diagnosis* (13th ed, 1989) and *Medical Aspects of Anorexia Nervosa* (1988). He leaves a wife, Rosemary; three children; and five grandchildren.

Clare Seamark

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c166

Ruth Martha Scott-Jupp (née Perrott) (Mrs Deane)



Former general practitioner Christchurch, Dorset (b 1925; q Trinity College, Dublin, 1948), died from heart failure on 24 September 2009.

After house jobs in Dublin, Ruth Martha Scott-Jupp (née Perrott) held short term and locum posts in England. After marriage and two children she worked on a short term basis in different general practices around Christchurch. In 1966 she joined the practice of two female general practitioners as a partner, making it the first all female partnership in the country. Ruth was also hospital clinical assistant in gynaecology, and founded and ran New Milton family planning clinic. She retired in 1986, handing her partnership to her daughter. Predeceased by her first husband, Harry Scott-Jupp, in 1980 and by her second, Bill Deane, in 2007, she leaves two children.

Robert Scott-Jupp

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c168

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