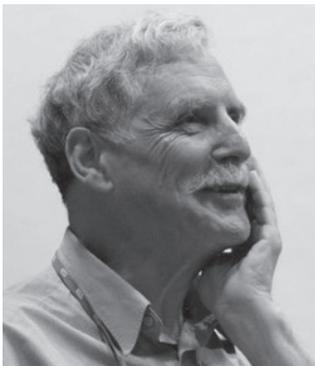


In Memory of Cecil Helman

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The Brazilian Medical Anthropology and Family and Community Medicine lost an important reference with the early passing of Cecil Helman, at the age of 65.

Born in South Africa, amongst a family of doctors, he graduated in Medicine there, and then migrated to England, where he worked as a General Practitioner associated to the National Health Service (NHS) for almost 30 years.

Early on, he was interested in medical Anthropology, accomplishing a solid academic background and assuming a position of global leadership in the area, being a pioneer recognized through important awards.

Helman was passionate about Brazil and had a big influence in the Brazilian medical Anthropology, especially from his main book “Culture, Health and Illness”, published in 1984 – the first Brazilian edition was published 10 years later. Certainly, this is his best known work, translated into many languages and that had a 5th Brazilian edition in 2009. It is in this book that the author scrutinizes the relationship of cultural factors with the health-disease process, a fundamental concept for a practice in health that intends to be effective and culturally sensitive.

A characteristic that marked his career was that he could easily go from medical Anthropology to Medicine itself like no other, linking the two fields of knowledge and pointing out the complementarity of them. This explains how he remained militating in such an extraordinary way in both areas for so long, putting into practice what he called “Clinically Applied Medical Anthropology”.

That characteristic of him was also marked on his book, which always pursued to explicit that relation through numerous examples. Although the book presents depth content, it was written in a way so the reading is pleasant, being used as bibliographic reference by numerous theoretical courses and it has also contributed to make medical Anthropology more accessible to health professionals. On the other hand, it also illustrates the complexity of health practice to the professionals of social sciences.

It seemed that Helman was never content. Each book edition came with new chapters, indicating the need to be in sync with what was happening around him and the constant changes of the current world. That explains, for instance, the inclusion of a chapter about migration, telemedicine and internet on the last edition of the book.

Helman has been in Brazil many times, country which he admired for its cultural diversity and great work developed by the Family and Community doctors with the population. He participated in many events of our specialty and developed research

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projects, having numerous friends. Extremely friendly and with a soft voice, he was always interested in hear about the exuberance of cultural aspects brought from the audience on his lectures.

His last book, *The Suburban Shaman* (2004), is a fantastic semi-biographical report of the cases he attended over his professional career. Consistent with the idea, Helman supported that “medical art is a literary art”, and the book gathers great examples of the essence of family doctors practice, in other words, the capacity to establish proper communication with the patient, simply *listen to* him/her copiously.

His work shows in a poignant way that comprehending the “narrative” of each human being under our care is what makes possible to put ourselves in the patients’ position and to understand their history, culture, their “characters”, the context in which we are inserted now and how important the combination of these points is to matters of health and disease.