



KENYA FIRSTS: MEDICINE | From Kampala to Nairobi with 10 bodies

Don who trained Kenya's first doctors

Kenya has had many unsung heroes in its 50 years of independence. Today, the Daily Nation starts a series on some of these Kenyans — people who were first to do something that many take for granted today.

BY CAROLINE THEURI
ctheuri@ke.nationmedia.com

In 1967, Kenya started training doctors. Dr Joseph Mungai had been teaching at Makerere for about a year when Kenya recalled him to start a medical school at University College, Nairobi. Makerere refused to let him go and Kenya had to pay off his contract.

Dr Mungai was named senior lecturer in Human Anatomy in February 1967, just five months before the 30 pioneer students were to report. There was a shortage of staff, equipment and teaching materials and Dr Mungai had to race against time.

One of the hurdles was how to get cadavers — human bodies used in practical lessons.

"There was no Anatomy Bill to enable the department to acquire cadavers for dissection," Dr Mungai wrote in his autobiography, *From Simple to Complex*. The National Assembly delayed passing the Bill due to some other urgent Bills.

Uganda had a special anatomy law, which allowed Makerere to collect unclaimed cadavers from mortuaries for teaching. MU agreed to provide Nairobi with 10 properly treated bodies from its medical school.

The departmental head of Veterinary Anatomy, Prof R. R. Hofmann, lent Dr Mungai his Land Rover to fetch the anatomy and histological materials from MU in the first week of June, 1967, because students were to report the following month.

CHRONOLOGY

Scholar a study in achievement



1932: Born at Pumwani Hospital, Nairobi

1939: Attends Mahinga Elementary School

1940: Kahuhu Primary School

1941: Transferred to Ngeca Primary School

1950: Joins Alliance High School

1954: Joins Makerere University College (MUC)

1955: Named best student in Biology in the London Intermediate Science Examination

1956: Admitted to MUC's Faculty of Medicine

1963: Graduated with Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery

1964: Receives master of medical and surgery degrees (MB, Ch.M)

1966: Receives PhD in Medicine from the University College of London.

1967: Returns to MUC as a lecturer only to be poached by the Kenyan government to head the Department of Human Anatomy at the University College, Nairobi.

But then no driver would accept to undertake that kind of journey. Furthermore without the anatomy law, anyone in charge of such a vehicle and its contents could technically still be prosecuted. I had no choice but to undertake the journey myself," says his book, published in 2002.

After securing letters of authority from the police and health ministers from both countries, Dr Mungai drove with a Ugandan medical student to Makerere. They reached Tororo town, at 10pm that

night. "At Tororo, we were required, to produce the vehicle's logbook and insurance certificate. We did not have them. We were immediately arrested and taken to Mbale, about 100 kilometres away, at midnight, to appear in court the following day," he says.

Police changed shift at midnight. One of them happened to be a classmate to the Ugandan veterinary student. After explaining their predicament, the police set them free to continue with their mission.

Dr Mungai eventually reached Makerere University where the medical school allowed him to formalise the release of the bodies. A week later the back of his Land Rover was loaded with 10 cadavers.

Police barrier

In the evening, Dr Mungai and the Ugandan student left for Nairobi. At 10pm, they reached the police barrier on the Kenyan border. An armed policeman came over to Dr Mungai and asked what was in the Land-Rover.

"Ten human bodies," he said.

"Ten what?" the policeman asked, as he went to the back of the vehicle to investigate.

"Human bodies," Dr Mungai said.

The policeman shone his torch on the plastic bags. He then left and his colleague went to Dr Mungai.

"What did you tell my colleague

you have in the vehicle?" he asked. "Ten human bodies," Dr Mungai answered.

"Where did you get them from?" "Makerere," Dr Mungai answered.

"What are you going to do with them?" he asked.

"I am going to start a medical school in Nairobi as required by the (Kenyan) government," said Dr Mungai.

Several other policemen did the same before Dr Mungai was asked to produce his passport and documents authorising him to carry cadavers. He complied and waited an hour before the policeman came back.

"You may proceed. Wish you a safe journey," he said. Dr Mungai never stopped driving for the rest of the night. He reached Nairobi at 9am.

When he reached the garage at Chiromo campus, he asked the nearest person to help him unload the cadavers, as he had dropped off the veterinary student home.

"He came over and looked at the vehicle carefully. When he realised what he was about to lay his hands on, he took to his heels towards the sports field, everybody else following him in flight," reads the book.

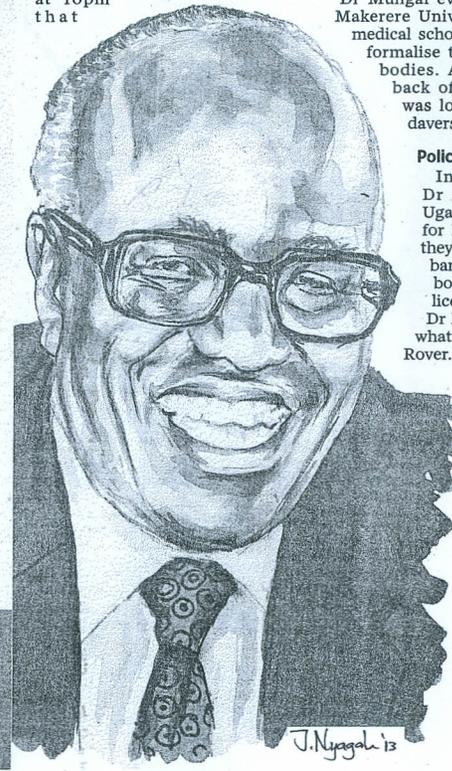
Eventually everyone fled, leaving the campus deserted. Some disappeared completely while others started coming back gradually, albeit with caution.

It was a cleaner who helped Dr Mungai to offload the cadavers. He had him promoted to laboratory assistant and brought to the Department of Human Anatomy.

On July 3, 1967, the first 30 medical students undertaking either a Bachelor of Medicine (MB) or a Bachelor of Chemistry (ChB), would be able to study human anatomy using the MU cadavers.

They studied human anatomy in one corner of the veterinary anatomy garage because their building was still under construction.

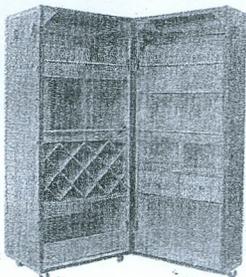
In 1972, the first doctors graduated. They have occupied prominent positions in Kenya and other countries.



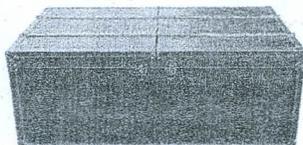
30

Number of pioneer students who reported in 1967 to study medicine at Chiromo Campus.

WESTLANDS BRANCH NOW OPEN, AT CORNER PLAZA - 2ND FLOOR



BRANCH OPENING SPECIAL



4Pc Sofa Set + Trunk Wine Cabinet + Trunk Cupboard
+ Trunk Coffee Table for only 140,000/=

LIMITED STOCK

Open On Sundays
10 am to 3 pm

ODDS & ENDS

See the full range at:
www.oddskenya.com

Mombasa Rd, 300m past Vision Plaza. Turn into dirt road at C&P.
Tel: 551515/0737771717/1616/1414
Email: sales@oddskenya.com