

Prominent SARS doctor in Canada dies at 68

September 19 2013

Dr. Donald Low, the public face of Toronto's response to the SARS outbreak in 2003, has died. He was 68.

Low, who became a trusted face and voice of the response to the epidemic, died Wednesday night after being diagnosed with a brain tumor this year. Allison McGeer, a former colleague, said Thursday he died with family at his side.

The SARS outbreak killed 44 people in Toronto and cost the city \$1 billion in tourism. Outside of Asia, Toronto had the largest outbreak, with almost 375 cases. During two outbreaks, more than 27,000 people in and around the city were forced into quarantine.

Low's capacity to explain to the public what was going on made him the face of Toronto's SARS response.

At one point, he had to go into quarantine himself because he'd been in contact with a colleague who came down with SARS. He worked from home and emerged, 14 days later, without developing the disease. He would later marvel that he never caught SARS, given the amount of exposure he had.

He visibly lost weight during the outbreak, prompting concerned strangers who saw him on TV news reports to write to ask after his health.

It would take four months to bring the disease under control.

Low was credited by friends and colleagues for both his contribution to the SARS response and for advancing the practice of microbiology and infectious diseases across Canada.

Colleagues said he loved to puzzle out intriguing new developments in infectious diseases. He co-authored nearly 400 peer-reviewed articles for scientific journals. Low was a global expert in flesh-eating disease—necrotizing fasciitis caused by group A *Streptococcus*. He was also an early and passionate champion of the need to combat antibiotic resistance by prudent use of the precious drugs.

Low is survived by his wife, Maureen Taylor, and by three children from a previous marriage.

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