

Canadian 'giant' of HIV research drowns

April 13 2017

Canadian scientist Mark Wainberg—described as a "giant" of HIV science and who had recently been working on finding a cure for the condition—has died at the age of 71, UNAIDS said on Thursday.

The internationally renowned scientist, who was at the forefront of HIV research from the very beginning of the global AIDS epidemic, drowned on Wednesday while swimming off Bal Harbour in Florida, Radio Canada said.

"UNAIDS is deeply saddened by the tragic death of pioneering HIV researcher Mark Wainberg," the agency dedicated to battling the disease said in a statement.

Wainberg and his colleagues identified one of the main anti-retroviral medicines used to treat HIV infection and also contributed to the understanding of HIV drug resistance.

"Mark Wainberg was a giant in HIV science," UNAIDS chief Michel Sidibe said in a statement, stressing that the researcher's work "contributed to saving millions of lives".

Linda-Gail Bekker, head of the International AIDS Society (IAS), which Wainberg lead from 1998, said the HIV/AIDS research community had "lost one of our fiercest champions".

"He was the epitome of dedication from the earliest days of the response," she said, adding that "the impact of his work... will live on

through the millions of people accessing HIV treatment and those of us who were lucky enough to know him".

Wainberg, who served as an informal advisor to UNAIDS, was heading AIDS research at the Lady Davis Institute for Medical Research at the Jewish General Hospital and also of McGill University's AIDS Centre in Canada at the time of his death.

During his time leading IAS, he organised the 13th International AIDS conference in Durban, South Africa, and he also co-chaired the same conference in Toronto in 2006.

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Citation: Canadian 'giant' of HIV research drowns (2017, April 13) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-04-canadian-giant-hiv.html>

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