



## obituaries

### Dr Taha Ahmed Baasher

Formerly Regional Advisor on Mental Health, World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Region

Taha was born on 2 June 1922 in Sawakin, the historical Red Sea port in Sudan. He graduated from Kitchener School of Medicine, Khartoum, in 1949 with Distinction and a prize in anatomy. He worked as a general practitioner in various parts of Sudan. He was then granted a scholarship to study psychiatry at the Maudsley. In 1972 he was elected Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

At the age of 35, Taha became Director of Mental Health, Ministry of Health, Sudan (1957–1972), succeeding the late Professor El-Tigani El-Mahi, the father of psychiatry in Black Africa. In 1960, Taha established a walk-in psychiatric out-patient clinic in Khartoum North. Between 1960 and 1968 he extended mental health services in Sudan, establishing four regional units. Against strong resistance by some senior clinicians from other disciplines, he managed, in 1965, to establish a psychiatric unit within Khartoum General (Teaching) Hospital, which became one of the World Health Organization's (WHO) collaborative research centres. In 1969, Taha became Minister of Health. He established El-Tigani El-Mahi Psychiatric Hospital in Omdurman, Khartoum province.



Under his leadership Khartoum hosted the World Psychiatric Association Symposium 1966, and the Pan African Psychiatric Conference 1970. The WHO acknowledged his pioneering work that led to the notable achievement of winning cooperation of Islamic faith healers in Sudan, making it possible for people with mental illness to access the modern psychiatric services.

As regional advisor on mental health (1972–82) he helped the 21 countries in WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region to develop their national mental health programmes.

In 1985, he was invited by the University of Khartoum to take the chair in psychiatry, the post he held until 2007.

In 1992, he chaired the council that established the Red Sea University in Eastern Sudan.

Taha's contributions were varied and vast. He was Vice President of the World Federation for Mental Health, member of the Executive Committee of the History of Psychiatry and the World Psychiatric Association, President of the Sudan Psychiatric Association and Secretary General of the Sudan Medical Association (now Sudanese Doctors' Union).

He was a member of the editorial board of the *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* journal, founding member of the Arab Board of Psychiatry, founding member of the Board of the Saudi Arabian DPM (1975) and winner of Arab Ministers' of Health Prize for Outstanding Achievements (1985).

In 1964, in his capacity as Secretary General for the Sudanese Doctors' Union, he played a pivotal role in the October Revolution that toppled the military dictatorship. The popular forces elected him Secretary for the Trade Union Front that led the transition to full democracy.

Taha passed away on 15 June 2008, during treatment in Geneva, and was buried in Khartoum. He is survived by his wife, Saydah, a practising consultant paediatrician, a son, Dr Rashid, and two daughters, Rawya and Ruaa. May God bless his soul.

Ahmed Sirag

doi: 10.1192/pb.bp.108.024307

### Dr Kenneth Arthur Day

Formerly Honorary Consultant Psychiatrist, Northgate Hospital, Morpeth

The problem with legendary people is that legends grow around them and you're never sure which are true. One story about Ken Day concerns his first visit to Northgate Hospital when he was still considering whether to apply for the post of consultant psychiatrist there. As he walked past one of the wards, a patient ran up to him, stopped, smiled at him and punched him in the face. Just at that moment, two nurses ran out of the ward and shouted to Ken 'Don't do anything, don't say anything – he's on a behavioural programme.' In confirming for me that this



story was true, Ken commented 'that's why I feel the way I do about behavioural psychology'. In fact, the behavioural psychologists were some of his closest

colleagues, who shared the same respect so many of us had for him.

Born in 1935 in Hanwell, London, to father Arthur and mother Irene Laura née Pope, Ken was educated at Hobbayne Junior School, Middlesex, and Greenford County Grammar School. He failed his 11+ exam first time around, passing at age 13 years. He always said that he was a late learner, and that this had engendered in him a lifelong empathy towards people with delays in learning skills. This was not so much legend as true, but it did make for a good joke which I heard used about him more than once. He did his National Service with the Royal Artillery from 1954 to 1956 and after a happy time at Bristol University he went on to train in psychiatry at Bristol Medical School (1956–1961), and Newcastle. From 1961 until 1969 when he became Consultant Psychiatrist at Northgate Hospital, Ken took up a number of posts in Bristol and Newcastle. He was a house physician,