

Dr. Cicely Williams:

One of the most remarkable doctors of our age



Dr. Cicely Delphine Williams is often known as one of the most remarkable doctors of our age.

A recent recipient of the Jamaican Order of Merit, Dr. Williams is well known for her distinguished work in the area of maternal and child health and infant nutrition.

She was born in Bethel Town in Westmoreland and went on to study in the United Kingdom. She then went on to work in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) where she was responsible for the identification and description of the disease "kwashiorkor", the protein deficiency which affects millions of babies at the weaning stage. Her classic observation on this illness has laid the foundation for extensive research on nutritional diseases of childhood and for all child nutrition programmes throughout the world.

From there she went to Malaya where she was taken a prisoner of war when the Japanese occupied Singapore.

Dr. Williams retired from the Colonial Medical Service in 1948 and returned to Jamaica when, from 1950-53 she pursued research on vomiting sickness. This later led to several important findings on the subject.

In 1969 she was awarded the Honorary D. Sc. from the UWI and was later to be awarded the James Spence Memorial Gold Medal from the British Paediatric Association in 1965, the Joseph Goldberger Award from the American Medical Association in 1967, the Champion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George in 1968 and the Martha Elliott Award in Maternal and Child Health, the highest award from the American Public Health Association.

Her brilliant career has taken her into the five continents and seventy countries and she has worked with the World Health Organisation (WHO), the

American University in Beirut, the Family planning Association in London, and the UWI. In December 1973 and 1974 she lectured to students in the Diploma in Community Nutrition Course in the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine of the UWI and also gave public lectures on "Kwashiorkor".

Although 82 years old, Dr. Williams is still Professor and Consultant in International Family Health at the Tulane University School of Public Health and visiting Professor in the Department of Paediatrics of the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

The conferring of the Order of Merit on Doctor Williams has been a special honour in the light that the Order is limited to 15 living members, and since its institution only three has been awarded. It is reserved for Jamaican citizens who have received eminent international distinction in the sciences, arts, literature or other fields of learning. It is especially fitting that the tribute should be presented in International Women's year to one who overcame the strong prejudices against her sex in medicine to become one of the most remarkable doctors of our age.