

Obituary

Professor Meo, a life dedicated to South Sudan

Professor Meo graduated in Turin in 1962, and specialized in emergency and thoracic surgery. In 1968 he and his colleagues founded Comitato Collaborazione Medica (CCM), an NGO dedicated to health development in emerging countries.

He worked as a Medical Officer in a rural hospital in Kenya (Eldama-Ravine) between 1970-1972. In 1984 CCM began its activities in South Sudan in the city of Wau in collaboration with the Health Training Institute. Since 1991, following a Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement

(SPLM) request, he started funding and operating a network of rural hospitals and Health Centers at Yirol, Billing, Adior, Turalei mission, Bunagok, rebuilding and restocking Rumbek hospital after the destruction of war as well as undertaking many surgical missions in remote areas in South Sudan.

Since his retirement in 2000, he dedicated most of his time to expand CCM activities in South Sudan and other African countries. Professor Meo became very close to the South Sudanese people during all the war years. During one of his missions in 1995, he was captured by the Government army of Sudan in Upper Nile and was held in hostage for 55 days. This experience further nurtured his ties with South Sudan. He was indeed very proud of being called "Mayodit" by his South Sudanese friends, patients and colleagues.

The main reason for his relentless activity, was to "bring surgical care to those who need it the most: the poor in the rural communities, even where conditions look almost impossible, at least by conventional surgery standards".

Three main principles have constantly inspired and driven his work:

1. Success relies on active participation of local people and communities with local political, administrative and traditional authorities consent and cooperation



2. Hospitals must be run by locals: capacity building, such as training and growth of local staff has to be a key goal of the mission itself. Many years of experience, working in South Sudan have demonstrated that

basic surgery saves lives and prevents disability. It can be done even in the most difficult (very adverse) conditions and with extreme scarcity of resources. Local professionals can be trained to learn required skills. This was one of the highest priorities for Professor Meo, who never stopped praising rural hospital personnel and staff for being

always hungry to learn, even if starting from basic levels of education.

3. Medical operations must be self-sustainable: structures, tools and technologies used in rural hospitals need to be appropriate for the local environment. As resources are limited and conditions adverse, everything must be done as effectively and inexpensively as possible.

With these principles Professor Meo greatly extended basic surgery in very remote areas. He also gave scientific dignity to this work that he used to call "surgery under very adverse conditions". On this topic he published several articles in specialized international medical journals, and presented it in scientific conferences, being recognized as an innovator in the matter. Recently he contributed to the South Sudan Medical Journal and was very proud of it as he had hoped to extend this valuable collaboration.

In June 2012, after returning from one of his recurring one-month surgical missions in Bunagok (Lakes State), he was diagnosed with a serious illness. In July he underwent a major surgery and faced with courage and faith the difficult recovery course. He died in his own home in Turin, Italy, surrounded by the affection of his family and his many friends on January 28th, 2013. He was 75 years.

The South Sudanese people, along with CCM and his family, have lost a great friend and a tireless travelling companion.