

# CNSS's Lifetime Achievement Award



This award is given to a senior (including retired) individual who has made an outstanding, notable or special contribution to neurosurgical teaching, practice or science.

2016's recipient is Dr. Renn Holness, MBBS, BSc, FRCSC.

Renn was born in Jamaica and attended Blake Preparatory School and Jamaica College, where he was a competitive athlete and won the 100, 200 and 440 yard sprints in 1960 and 1961. He went on to study medicine at the University of the West Indies, he then studied at Guy's Hospital in England, earning a BSc in Anatomy before returning to UWI to complete his Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) in 1968.

## RENN HAS RECEIVED NUMEROUS HONOURS OVER THE YEARS INCLUDING:

**2010:** Honourary degree in medicine (DSc) from UWI

**2010:** Recognition from Caribbean College of Surgeons for contributions to Caribbean Neurosurgery

**2006:** Who's Who in Black Canada 2

**2006:** Pelican Award for a UWI graduate who has contributed significantly to the development of the University or has made an outstanding contribution to Jamaica

**2005:** Dr. John Savage Memorial Award for International Health at Dalhousie University

**2005:** Key Note Address, UWI Medical Alumni Association

**2004:** Caribbean Health Research Council Award of Excellence

**2003:** Guest of Honour, 1<sup>st</sup> Caribbean Neurosciences Symposium

**2000:** Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre Distinguished Service Award

**1998:** UWI 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Alumni Achievement Award

**1996:** UWI Distinguished Graduate Award

He performed an internship at Port-of-Spain General Hospital in Trinidad from 1968-1969 before completing a residency in General Surgery at University of Michigan in 1972. He moved on to Neurosurgical training at Dalhousie University in Halifax and University of Toronto, successfully completing RCPSC examinations in 1976. He joined the staff at Dalhousie in 1977, initially as a Lecturer.

Then he served as Program Director for the Residency Program from 1983 – 1990 and by 1987 had become Professor and Head of the Division of Neurosurgery, a position which he held until 2000. Thereafter, he served as the Director of Undergraduate Surgical Education in the Department of Surgery until 2006.

Clinically, he made several groundbreaking contributions. He was a co-author on the original description of the cervical interlaminar clamp in 1984 (a.k.a. "Halifax Clamp"), which was a revolutionary development in posterior cervical spinal stabilization at the time and remained in use for decades. He was also the first neurosurgeon in Canada to perform fetal tissue transplants for Parkinson Disease in 1992. He was a local site Principal Investigator for many international studies. Although competent in all aspects of Neurosurgery, Renn excelled in cerebrovascular surgery, pituitary surgery and skull base surgery. As in many aspects of life, Renn was an early adopter of endovascular therapy for cerebral aneurysms and presented a CCNS Abstract on the "paradigm shift" in aneurysm treatment in 2001, at a time when most international experts were still skeptical of the efficacy of the new technique.

Renn was an active member of the Canadian Neurosurgical Society,



serving as a Council Member (1985 – 1988); Secretary-Treasurer from 1990-1993; President-Elect in 1993-1994 and then as President for a one-year term in 1994-1995.

He was an Examiner for the RCPSC Examination in Neurosurgery from 1986 – 1991 and later became Chief Examiner for the RCPSC Examinations in Neurosurgery from 1997 – 2000. He also served as an External Reviewer for the RCPSC on many several occasions.

Throughout his career in Halifax, Renn remained active in international medicine. He delivered decommissioned but serviceable surgical equipment from Canada to Jamaica, while at the same time arranging for Jamaican trainees to come to Canada for electives and longer periods of training, often at personal expense. He also coordinated treatments for Jamaican patients in Canada and the United States, again using personal resources. He used sabbatical time in 1993 and 2000 to return to UWI to teach in Barbados and Nassau.

In 2009, he retired from clinical practice at Dalhousie University and returned to Jamaica, working for the last 7 years to develop a new neurosurgical program in Montego Bay. He has done this with limited institutional resources, few colleagues around for support, but endless perseverance and passion. He remains active in teaching medical students and residents at the University of the West Indies.