

ICU Doctor Postponed Retirement and Died from COVID-19

This article is from the “Edifying the Body” section of the Church of God Big Sandy’s website, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of May 23, 2020. A version of the article was posted at businessinsider.com on May 19.

By Julia Naftulin

BROOKLYN, N.Y.—Dr. James Mahoney worked at the same Brooklyn hospital for nearly 40 years before he was admitted there with COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. He was transferred to a nearby hospital, where he later died.

Scheduled to retire

Mahoney, a 62-year-old pulmonary specialist and ICU doctor, was about to retire when the coronavirus pandemic overtook New York City.

That’s when Mahoney decided he wouldn’t retire but would continue to serve the sickest COVID-19 patients.

Extra shifts

In March, when coronavirus cases in New York sharply increased, Mahoney worked at his hospital (University Hospital of Brooklyn). But he also took on extra shifts at Kings County Hospital Center across the street and telemedicine calls with existing patients.

Dr. Robert F. Foronjy, Mahoney’s boss, said the doctor acted fearlessly during his time treating COVID-19 patients, rushing into rooms as monitors sounded off, alerting him a patient was crashing.

“There were people who were really reluctant to go into the rooms, and you could understand why,” Foronjy described. “He saw another human being in need, and he didn’t hesitate to help.”

Role model

Mahoney worked at University Hospital in Brooklyn since 1982. During that time, he was a medical student, then a pulmonary physician, then a professor for the school he once went to himself.

His lasting presence at the facility will be missed, by both his colleagues and black medical students who saw Mahoney as a role model.

“As a young black man, I looked at this guy and said to myself, ‘Twenty years from now I want to be like him,’ ” said Latif A. Salam, a doctor who works in internal medicine at University Hospital. “When a black medical student, a black resident, sees him, he sees a hero. Someone that you can be one day.”

Underfunded hospitals

Compared to other New York hospitals, University Hospital is known to be severely underfunded and a place that serves much of Brooklyn’s poor and black community.

When the hospital had to use duct tape and plastic tarps to separate COVID-19 patients and rely on paper and pen to take vital signs rather than the computer systems other hospitals use, Mahoney’s work ethic and generosity kept the staff going, his colleagues said.

“Not only did he heal people’s bodies, he healed their minds and their souls,” said Michelle King, Mahoney’s office assistant.

Did not die alone

Mahoney went to University Hospital’s emergency room on April 20 with COVID-19 symptoms—when he had trouble breathing, a fever, and could barely walk.

He was transferred to Tisch Hospital in New York City after doctors determined Tisch was better equipped to care for Mahoney’s needs.

There, they put him on oxygen to help his breathing.

Unfortunately, they weren’t able to save him.

On April 27, Mahoney died in Tisch Hospital in New York City.

Mahoney’s colleagues visited him regularly during his last days there, which they said felt like a treat considering that many COVID-19 patients die alone.

“I got to visit him, hold his hand,” Foronjy said. “And he knew how much I loved him. And he knew how much everyone here loved him. We said a lot of things that week that needed to be said.”