

Eulogy for Dr. Ada A. Adimora by Dr. Myron S. Cohen
Read at the World Overcomers Christian Church, January 8, 2024

My name is Mike Cohen. For 30 years I served as Chief of Infectious Disease at the University of North Carolina and for the past 20 years I have been the Director of UNC's Institute for Global Health and Infectious Disease and Associate Vice Chancellor.

Ada Adimora and Paul Godley were my friends and colleagues for three decades-and sometimes when Ada allowed it – I was also her boss (BRIEFLY)

Today I will focus on Ada's professional accomplishments, which are woven into the fabric of our small and tight knit Chapel Hill and UNC community.

Ada started her career at UNC on November 26, 1989, after working briefly for the North Carolina Department of Communicable Diseases. She rose rapidly through the academic ranks in our Infectious Disease Division. She was ultimately named the Sarah Graham Kenan Distinguished Professor of Medicine and Epidemiology, with faculty appointments in both the Schools of Medicine and Public Health at UNC

What should I say about Ada?

Foremost, Ada was a talented and passionate physician, with hundreds of loyal and loving patients, some of whom are with us here today.

Ada was a world-famous researcher focused throughout her career on the prevention and treatment of HIV infection, especially as an advocate for women and women of color. She conducted groundbreaking studies in this area and made many public health contributions over her long career.

Ada was a leader. She served on the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease Advisory Council, on the Board of the International AIDS Society, as President of the HIV Medical Association, and as a force in many other organizations as well.

Ada was a role model and leader for women faculty at UNC, and especially women in our infectious disease group. But this commitment was not without its hazards, at least for me. Ada organized what she called the Infectious Disease Women's Faculty Lunch" to which no men were invited or allowed. Not to be too paranoid, but I tried to invite myself to the lunches, crash the lunches, surreptitiously record the lunches or as a last resort recruit a spy. None of this was successful. I ask you, what did they talk about?

Ada was a teacher. She received a special NIH Award in which she served as a mentor to women of color at UNC. And she directed several different special NIH training grants to students at all levels in the US and from around the world.

Ada's contributions did not go unnoticed. She received many Awards for her work from UNC, nationally and internationally. In 2019 Ada was elected to the US National Academy of Medicine, among the highest of honors for those in American medicine and Public Health.

While all of this was a lot of work, Ada had great pride and joy in her career. Through her work she traveled the world, often with her beloved husband Paul and sometimes her children Bria and Allegro.

This was a family we all admired. Paul was a wonderful photographer and tour guide.

However, these trips created an unexpected issue I must mention. Paul bought Ada a special piece of jewelry in every European city they visited. This unique sign of affection did not go unnoticed by others in our group and it set a new, and high standard that I am not sure anyone else ever met.

Ada was a strong and determined woman. But she could be tough. She simply did not tolerate incompetence. Bluntly, if I fired everyone Ada told me to fire over three decades, I am pretty sure UNC could not have stayed open. I can hear her voice ringing in my ear... you need to fire ... but I won't add any names here. But this attitude was surely linked to her own high expectations for herself and others, and her great courage.

If you look at Ada's work and her writings or listen to her lectures you will see her shining and unwavering commitment to better medicine and public health, and her forceful rejection of health inequality.

Let me bring my comments to a close. As many of you know, I am a huge fan of Pastor Andy and this Church. But I am Jewish. When Jews suffer a loss of someone we love, Ada, we say an ancient prayer called the Mourners Kaddish. This prayer is central in my mind today. Regardless of your religious belief many of you may have heard this prayer before. In Aramaic the prayer begins **Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba.**

This prayer is designed to give us comfort in our time of grief, and I mention this prayer hoping it will give all of us comfort today. And I will end my comments as we end the recitation of the Mourners Kaddish "may the memory of our friend Ada Adimora be a blessing to us all", and then let us all say together, "Amen."

