

## Oakland doctor devoted to care of HIV/AIDS patients dies at 65

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By Sean Maher

OAKLAND — Dr. Robert C. Scott III, beloved for the devoted care he gave HIV/AIDS patients at his Oakland practice and as far away as Zimbabwe, died Oct. 8 in Alta Bates Summit Medical Center in Oakland. He was 65.

Scott had been practicing medicine in Oakland for more than three decades. He was renowned for his work fighting HIV/AIDS on many fronts: giving free treatment to indigent patients in Oakland, spreading awareness of and compassion for sufferers of the illness and even setting up a volunteer practice in Zimbabwe, where in 2004 he became the first African-American ever to become licensed to practice medicine, a spokeswoman said.

In 1983, Scott founded AIDS Project of the East Bay in Oakland, described as a community-based organization dedicated to preventing the spread of HIV and supporting individuals infected with the virus through programs targeted at some of the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals in Alameda County, according to Sandra Varner, a public relations professional.

"He went beyond the call of duty to care for us. Everybody felt special," Oakland resident Kenny Hall, 58, said. Hall said Scott was his primary care physician for more than 20 years.

"He was our father, he was our friend, he was our colleague, he was our pastor," Hall said. Dr. Scott, "I told him one day, you have your own church, your own body of parishioners, but it happens that you are a physician. You are God's physician healing who you can."

Scott established an AIDS ministry at Allen Temple Baptist Church, where he also served as an usher.

"I thought that was amazing," colleague Deborah Wafer said. "Usually doctors are deacons and trustees, all big shots in the church. He was a major figure in the community, but his job was to help people find a seat. I talked with him, and he said he felt being a servant was his job."

Through the ministry, Scott raised money to buy HIV/AIDS medicine he would pack into suitcases and carry with him to his clinic in Zimbabwe, Wafer said.

"People would line up two days before, knowing Dr. Scott was going to come," she said. "And he never let anything get in his way. If he said he'd be there on a certain day, he'd be there, no matter how hairy it got."

Scott was drawn to the fight against HIV/AIDS because "he felt a lot of care for people dying when there was no need to die, when others wouldn't take care of them," Wafer said.

"There was so much stigma and lack of knowledge tied to HIV," Wafer said. "People were dying

in the 1980s because physicians wouldn't even take care of people who had it. He was one of the first African-Americans to step forward, and this was a disease that impacted African-Americans disproportionately."

"Men who might have sex with men, they would rather die than tell families they have HIV," Wafer continued. "It became about fighting stigma, educating churches and families — he would go with patients to tell their families. He set up classes so patients could learn about HIV, learn about treatment that would improve their adherence to medicines. People were afraid of those things."

In a personal blog post dedicated to Scott, San Francisco resident Jorge Krohn wrote, "At the end of each office visit, he would give me a huge bear hug. It was in those moments that I knew that I was loved and cared for. He unknowingly taught me how hugs can make a big difference in a person's life."

Despite his reputation for taking time to show care and patience for his patients, Scott was known among other colleagues as a down-to-business, no-nonsense kind of man.

"He didn't have any time for small chatter, because he was always burning rubber," said Richard Olive, a fundraiser for National Medical Fellowships. A scholarship recipient himself when he was in medical school, Scott "was always upfront and out there, digging in the bushes for financial support for the scholarships we provide," Olive said.

"He was very much to the point on everything. He didn't waste a moment, because he was always busy with his patients, frequently working very long, 12 and 13-hour days."