RIP: AIDS Researcher and Former IAS President Mark Wainberg

He cites organizing an AIDS conference in South Africa in 2000 as “the most important thing I ever did.” Here’s why. [VIDEO]

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Mark Wainberg, who is known for his 1989 discovery of 3TC as an antiviral drug and who later led the International AIDS Society (IAS), died this week in Bal Harbour, Florida. He was 71.

According to an IAS statement, Wainberg was president of the group from 1998 to 2000 and founded the Journal of the International AIDS Society (JIAS) in 2004. A pioneering researcher and advocate, he was serving as one of the journal’s editors when he died. He was also the head of AIDS research at the Lady Davis Institute for Medical Research and director of the McGill University AIDS Centre in Montreal.

“When I look back on my career,” Wainberg recently wrote to IAS members, “I always feel that the most important contribution of my life was political and not scientific.”

“We have lost one of our fiercest champions,” said IAS president Linda-Gail Bekker in the group’s statement. “To those of us in the research community, he was the epitome of dedication from the earliest days of the response. The impact of his work both through and beyond his role with the IAS will live on through the millions of people accessing HIV treatment and those of us who were lucky enough to know him.”

A global association of HIV professionals, the IAS stewards two HIV conferences—the International AIDS Conference and the IAS Conference on HIV Science.

In 2000, when Wainberg was president of IAS, the International AIDS Conference was held in Durban, South Africa, the first time it took place in a developing nation. In the video below, he talks about how that conference highlighted the importance of access to HIV meds in countries like South Africa. He also speaks about the legacy of AIDS advocacy and research and how they’ve influenced the fight against hepatitis C.

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