

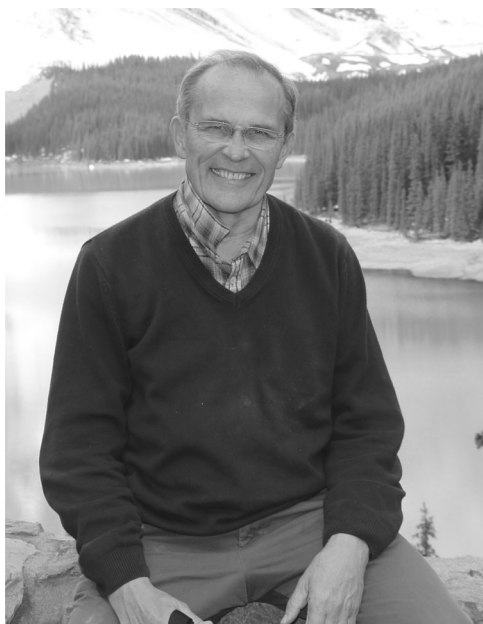


OBITUARY

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Brian Patrick Gardner

17th July 1948–15th November 2019

It was with great sadness that spinal injury circles across the world received the news of the loss of Brian Gardner on 15th Nov 2019. This was following an energetic fight with cancer that he handled extremely well. Many in the spinal injury field, patients, relatives and colleagues will long remember Brian as a champion for those who had the misfortune to have received injury to their spine. Those of us who worked with him or were fortunate enough to be trained by him, are saddened by his passing. He left a legacy that will never be forgotten. I, like many others who were

privileged to have worked with him, knew him as a colleague, a mentor, and above all, as a loyal friend.

Brian's journey in life took him through many lands to study, work, teach, support and research. Brian was born in Lusaka, Zambia, where he spent the first 15 years of his life. He qualified from Oxford in 1973. Following an unusual path that took him through hospitals in London, Cambridge and Bedford, he joined Stoke Mandeville as a Senior House Officer then Registrar in spinal injuries in 1978 before moving on to the Royal Victoria in Belfast to do Neurosurgery. This kindled his interest in spinal injuries. He moved back to Stoke Mandeville as a consultant in 1985 after working as a Senior Registrar in Southport for 4 years during which he completed a 9-month travelling fellowship to the USA and carried out pioneering research on high level spinal injuries and artificial ventilation.

Brian became a cornerstone of the clinical work at Stoke Mandeville for 30 years as a consultant and for 5 of those years as clinical lead. He was also involved in many fields including teaching, lecturing and travelling widely to promote a holistic approach to spinal injury treatment and rehabilitation. He was instrumental in starting many key research projects that had a major impact on medical practice in spinal injuries. These included the fields of artificial ventilation, sexual dysfunction, life expectancy and many other areas of research. He was also an adviser to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, and the Association for Personal Injury Lawyers in the UK. He held elected offices for the British Association of Spinal Cord Injury Specialists, the International Spinal Cord Society, among other professional organisations. He was treasurer to IMSOP (1987–1995) and a member of the Executive Council during this period. He was also a member of the ISCoS Prevention Committee (2011–2017) and in an advisory capacity afterwards.

The spirit of resilience, perseverance and determination that we have seen in Brian was an inspiration to all of those who worked with him. He was acutely aware of the plight and suffering of others; the high tetraplegic who struggled to breath; the young paraplegic denied a light-weight

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wheelchair because of post code lottery; or those unable to live in a decent adapted home fit for their needs. Brian served his patients not only as a doctor but also to give a voice to those who were not heard, to add a rung to the ladder of opportunity for the disabled, and to make sense of a life after catastrophic spinal injury. He used his wide knowledge and eclectic gifts to touch many broken lives, and right many wrongs through his years at Stoke Mandeville. He did this not only through medical work but by closely supporting charities with his plans and suggestions as well as medico-legal work which complimented his clinical efforts. He became one of the few leading expert witnesses on all matters related to spinal cord injury. He managed to positively influence the life of many through his legal reports and testimonies. He maintained this work to the last days of his life.

I can still hear his softly spoken ‘long-winded’ remarks and comments. Sometimes ‘annoyingly long’ especially during meetings. Calmly but determined he was in supporting his colleagues and patients. And yet, while the causes he championed became occasionally personal, his disagreements never did. While he was seen by some of his critics as a partisan trouble maker, that is not the lens through which Brian saw the world, nor was it the lens through which his colleagues saw him. He had great nobility that prevented his differences of opinion with others from becoming barriers to cooperation and mutual respect. His smile, good humour and encouragement in the most difficult of times we will miss most.

And that is how Brian Gardner became one of the greatest doctors of our time in the field of spinal injury. He did it by sticking to ethics and principles; yes, but also by seeking compromise and shared common cause through friendship, kindness, and humour. I met him for the first time in Baghdad in 1987 shortly after he was appointed consultant at Stoke Mandeville. Brian, being Brian, sought quickly to help others from his new position and took the opportunity to visit the spinal unit in Baghdad during the Iran–Iraq war to try to help victims of that senseless violence. He always remembered our first encounter as that during which he was bombarded with difficult questions from a young doctor that he was most happy to invite to join his team several years later.

It was Brian, the friend and the colleague who was always the first to pick up the phone in an hour of need and say,

‘What can I do to help?’ He also recognised his occasional mistakes and openly admitted that he learned from his juniors. He was the boss so much respected that once in front of a crown court, during my cross-examination by a hawkish barrister, as to how can I possibly challenge my boss’s opinion; I said it was Brian who taught me how.

He was kind, tender and a dedicated professional who persevered throughout his life to provide his patients with the best possible care; not for the sake of ambition or vanity; not for wealth or power; but only for the humanity that he loved.

Brian had strong faith that guided him throughout his life. He was a family man. A loving husband to Stephanie and a loving father to his nine children; some have followed his steps into medical and caring careers. I am sure that many of us will remember Brian Gardner for many years to come. May he rest in eternal peace.

A farewell message from Brian Gardner

Whilst I was studying at Oxford I went to a series of lectures on the great religions of the world. I was struck by the almost universal acceptance of the Golden Rule, which is to ‘Treat others as you would like them to treat you’. The word ‘others’ includes not only friends and family but also enemies and every facet of the beautiful natural world which we all share and for which we are caretakers.

Gradually, belatedly and imperfectly I have come to realise that the only way to apply the Golden Rule effectively is by understanding others through using two ears, two eyes and one mouth in that proportion.

We all see life through different prisms, but I hope that most of us accept the Golden Rule. I hope each evening you will reflect on your day in the light of the Golden Rule and when the next day comes you will follow the Golden Rule a little better, and hopefully much better than me.

Brian

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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