
AN APPRECIATION

Ralph Wright

Professor Ralph Wright, professor of medicine in Southampton University Medical School, died in an accident at his Isle of Wight home on 17 August 1990. Born in South Africa and graduating from Cape Town in 1954, part of his early medical career was spent in the 'bush' caring for the native black population. This involved the provision of clinical care ranging from medicine to obstetrics and performing his own laboratory tests including the occasional forensic necropsy when necessary. This experience was a major influence on his views and opinions, and although he retained a strong love for the country and its peoples he hated its political regime.

After the Sharpeville massacre he decided to leave South Africa and shortly afterwards took a junior post in the Nuffield Department of Medicine at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, from which he progressed to become its May Reader. It was here that he published extensively with Dr Sidney Truelove on the immunopathology of diseases of the gut and described, in conjunction with Professor Klatskin, the association of the Australia antigen (HBsAg) with acute and chronic hepatitis and conducted a large survey on the association of halothane anaesthesia with acute liver disease. In 1971 he was appointed professor of medicine in

Southampton where he soon established a thriving department oriented towards gastrointestinal medicine and liver disease. From among the many papers and projects from his department he took an especial pride in the success of the international multiauthor reference book on liver and biliary disease which he conceived and co-edited.

Although justly enjoying international recognition as an expert in liver diseases, he will be particularly remembered and respected by those who worked with him for his personal qualities. A keen sportsman, he played goal for the combined South African Universities football team in his student days and in later life became an enthusiastic yachtsman. He was an open and approachable man of boundless energy who hated pomposity and pretentiousness. He could be uncompromising and outspoken on issues that he held strongly. He loved the concepts of the NHS, rejected totally any association with private medicine, and believed firmly in the principles of equality in all aspects of his work and life. Above all else he was devoted to his family who had only recently gathered together to celebrate his 60th birthday. He is survived by his mother, wife, and five daughters.

To work with him was a privilege, to know him was both a pleasure and a delight.

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