
The world of ophthalmology mourns the loss of Peter Watson who recently died at the age of 86 from prostate cancer. He was a giant in the specialty making very considerable contributions in several different areas of interest.

Peter trained at the City Road branch of Moorfields Eye Hospital in the early 1960s. At that time Professor Barrie-Jones was at the height of his powers and became an important influence over Peter’s subsequent career.

In 1965 he was appointed Consultant Ophthalmologist to the Addenbrooke’s Hospital, Cambridge. At the same time, with Barrie-Jones’s encouragement, he established the Scleritis Clinic at Moorfields and was subsequently appointed to the Consultant Staff.

These appointments were the basis for a lifetime of clinical excellence, teaching and research. His interests ranged widely covering glaucoma, scleritis and inflammatory eye disease, corneal graft rejection, trachoma, amblyopia, biochemistry and metabolism. But it is for his interest in scleritis and inflammatory eye disease that Peter is mainly known. His book “The Sclera and Systemic Disease” is into its third edition and continues to be widely regarded as the authority on the subject.

Glaucoma was another major interest. Prior to 1970 variations of full thickness filtration surgery were the mainstay of the surgical treatment of glaucoma. Recognising their unreliable results and frequent complications, Peter in collaboration with the late John Cairns developed the trabeculectomy operation. Largely thanks to Peter’s research, publications and teaching, trabeculectomy became the standard procedure for glaucoma and continues to be so today.

His clinical work and research produced numerous publications; 7 books, 18 chapters, 168 papers of which he was first author in 89. Retirement from the NHS did not slow him down - just the opposite as it allowed him to travel extensively teaching and collaborating with colleagues around the world. His authority and achievements brought him international acclaim and awards, amongst them: The Doyne Medal Lecture (1982), The Duke-Elder International Gold Medal (ICO) 2002, and The Jules François International Research Gold Medal (2014).
Despite his research interests and the commitments of a Consultant appointment in a busy teaching hospital, Peter found time to be involved in the wider interests of UK ophthalmology. He served on the Council of the OSUK until it’s disbandment in 1987. He was one of the founding fathers of the College of Ophthalmologists and served on the Council from its inception until 1995. He was a Senior Vice-President and chaired the Scientific Committee and the Staffing and Facilities Committee.

He served on the Council of the Oxford Ophthalmological Congress and had the honour of being the Master for 1983 – 1984. He was the editor of ‘Eye’ from 1986 – 1993. In 1992 he was the Deputy Hospitaller for the Order of St John of Jerusalem. Just as Oxford had its own Ophthalmological Congress it seemed only right that Cambridge should also have its own institution - an anomaly that Peter addressed when he founded the Cambridge Ophthalmological Symposium in 1970. For many years he was the organiser and editorial secretary of this annual meeting, which soon became established as one of the most important events in the ophthalmic calendar.

Peter was a great supporter of the International Council of Ophthalmology (ICO) and served on its Council for many years (1992 – 2009) and became President of the Academia Ophthalmologica Internationalis, the most senior academic organisation in ophthalmology. Recognising the need for comparative international standards he set up the ICO’s International Assessment Test, the only world-wide medical specialty examination. This exam has proved popular and effective in driving up standards around the world and has already been taken by over 19,500 candidates.

Peter was one of the founders of the Moorfields Alumni Association (now the Moorfields Association) and its Honorary President from 2005 to 2009. Last year, in recognition of his illustrious career the MA presented him with the Lifetime Achievement Award and his name has been added to the Honours Board.

He is survived by his wife Ann, his three son and two daughters and numerous grandchildren.

David L Boase, 28th February 2017