

Wallace, David Charles



Qualifications: MB BS Syd (1948) MRCP Lond (1952) MRACP (1959) MD Syd (1968) FRACP (1968)

Born: 13/10/1925

Died: 19/6/1979

Biography:

David Wallace sandwiched a remarkable life into his short fifty-three years. During his childhood his father became the Director General of Health of New South Wales and the family moved from Newcastle to Sydney where David was educated at the Sydney Church of England Grammar School (Shore) and then at Sydney University where he graduated with honours in 1948. After residencies at Sydney Hospital and Prince Henry Hospital, Sydney, and at the Hammersmith Hospital he gained MRCP (London) in 1952, the first of his year to obtain a higher qualification.

He returned to a general practice in Geelong, Victoria and then in 1958 he became geriatrician at Greenvale Village with an appointment as an associate at the medical professorial unit at St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne. During this time he was awarded the Sir Edward Hallstrom and Sir Herbert Olney travelling fellowship in geriatrics. He retained his interests in geriatrics when he moved to Goulburn, NSW to work as a consulting physician where he set up a coronary care unit in the early days of their development. During his Goulburn days he became a founding member of the Australian Association of Gerontology and later secretary and president. He was with the late Richard Gibson FRACP (*qv*), one of the founders of the discipline of geriatrics in Australia.

Clearly now he was interested also in clinical cardiology but he had become interested in a family with a hitherto undescribed syndrome. He pursued this with such diligence that by 1968 he had described the syndrome and its genetics and gained an MD (Sydney) for a thesis "Hereditary sensory radicular neuropathy: a family study" for the same year as he gained the FRACP. His appetite for genetics was now whetted and he left Goulburn to learn clinical genetics at Pontecorvo's Unit at Glasgow University from which he returned to Australia to the Queensland Institute of Medical Research as geneticist. Those who worked with him in those years paid tribute to his mathematical skills with a production of ingenious models of the ageing process and a new theory for the extrachromosomal inheritance of Leber's hereditary optic atrophy. Whilst in Brisbane he also carried out extensive studies on the genetics of Huntington's Chorea for which he later received international recognition. His colleagues recall with pleasure the many humorous stories he told of his endeavours in outback Queensland to obtain details of family histories: of an interview with a mildly demented paranoid bearer of a rifle on a homestead verandah, the only such person in a family living next to the farm of a family bearing the gene. He also worked on the genetics of melanoma having had major surgery for it whilst at

Goulburn. As he explained, it gave an emotional incentive to his work.

In 1970 he resigned from the QIMR and took another major step - he went to Vietnam as OC 1st Australian Field Ambulance. He spoke little of this time later but clearly it reflected his driving commitment to pursue what he saw as his duty, a commitment evident to all who knew him. In Vietnam he concluded that his real niche was indeed in clinical medicine and he took up a position at Royal Newcastle Hospital as staff physician. He headed up and developed the cardiology unit, introduced Holter scanning and echocardiography and became a member of the Cardiac Society. He also took an interest in cardiac rehabilitation and participated in a number of clinical trials. He was appointed clinical associate professor at the University of Newcastle Medical School and he was proud to be associated with the new faculty created by his classmate, the founding dean, the late David Maddison FRACP (qv). He also took time off to have several tussles with his melanoma and subsequently moved into private consulting practice until retirement was forced upon him. He published at least thirty papers in major journals on topics as diverse as genetics, the natural history of cerebral vascular disease, the first description of reserpine induced depression and an evaluation of cardiac rehabilitation.

These are the bare bones of the life of an outstanding physician. He was very devoted to his wife Nancy and their four children, two of whom followed him into medicine. For them, as for himself, he was unswerving in the setting of his standards and they have learned his lessons well; he sacrificed much for the education of his children. For holidays they shared his pleasure in outdoor recreation and skiing. Perhaps the challenges and the new terrain to be explored were a paradigm of his life. His love of, and interest in, books was remarkable; the David Wallace Collection in the Gardiner Library at Royal Newcastle Hospital is a tribute from his professional colleagues, but my memory of him is his courage. In his last illness he looked death in the face and returned its gaze without flinching.

Author: JM DUGGAN

References: *Hum Genet Soc Aus Newsl*, 3, March 1980; *Med J Aust* 1980, 1, 40-41.