Roger Blamey
Pioneer breast surgeon who led the development of the Nottingham prognostic index

Roger Blamey (b 1935; q Cambridge 1961; FRACS (Hon), FRCPs (Hon) Glas, FRCS Eng), died on 1 September 2014.

In 1961, when Roger Blamey completed his medical studies at the University of Cambridge, there was basically one standard approach to breast cancer treatment—the radical mastectomy. The understanding of tumour development and risk to patients was primitive by today’s standards. Sometimes both breasts would be removed needlessly.

While training in surgery and studying cancer during the 1960s and early 70s, Blamey became determined to help improve breast cancer treatment. He wanted to tailor the treatment of patients with breast cancer so that they received the most appropriate therapy rather than the broad based standard of the day.

In 1973, soon after being appointed senior lecturer in surgery at the University of Nottingham, Blamey orchestrated the founding of the Nottingham/Tenovus Breast Cancer Study, a collaboration with the Tenovus Research Institute in Cardiff. The team’s goal was to develop a better method of predicting life expectancy for patients with breast cancer. During the next nine years Blamey’s team analysed the treatment of hundreds of patients, while monitoring their progress after the treatment and studying a range of potential prognostic and predictive factors.

Christopher W Elston, who led pathological aspects of the study and was an original member of the team, says that the Tenovus Research Institute provided expertise in oestrogen receptor techniques, while John Haybittle from Cambridge dealt with the statistics. Over the years others participated in the research project. “With his drive and enthusiasm, Roger Blamey built up a collaboration with many other departments and individuals who all made a significant contribution,” says Elston, now retired from his positions as consultant histopathologist at the City Hospital, Nottingham, and as special professor in tumour pathology. “But every such team needs a leader, and he was it. Without Roger at the helm far less would have been achieved.”

The research team’s first paper was published in 1976 in the British Journal of Surgery and identified “poor prognosis” for primary breast cancer patients. That paper was followed by two dozen papers over the next six years.

In 1982 the team announced a new prognostic index in primary breast cancer in a paper published in the British Journal of Cancer. The index, now known as the Nottingham prognostic index, or the NPI, is based on lymph node stage, tumour size, and pathological grade. An NPI prognosis gives patients an indication of whether the breast cancer is likely to be cured, and the patient’s life expectancy. In doing so it helps patients and doctors to better manage treatment options.

Kieran Horgan, president of the UK Association of Breast Surgery, says that the NPI “is currently in everyday use in most UK centres and also accepted across the world for its simplicity and accuracy.” He credits Blamey for nurturing the “high calibre multidisciplinary team” that devised the index.

Roger Wallas Blamey was born on 16 March 1935 in Southgate, north London. His mother was the niece of Graham Wallas, a political scientist who in 1895 cofounded the London School of Economics. He studied at Downing College, Cambridge, completing medical training at Middlesex Hospital Medical School in London. He graduated in 1961 and four years later became a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. After several surgical appointments, Blamey was awarded a research fellowship to work at Cardiff University under Pat Forrest, who in 1985 would be appointed by the UK government to chair an expert committee to study the effectiveness of screening for breast cancer. In 1969 Blamey was awarded an MD and in 1970 he moved to Australia to work for two years at the University of Melbourne under Richard Clayton Bennett. He returned to Cambridge for additional training in breast surgery and renal transplantation before his move to Nottingham, where he was named a professor in 1980.

In 1973, while Blamey was founding the Nottingham/Tenovus Breast Cancer Study, he also was laying the foundation for Nottingham to become a major renal centre, and in 1974 performed the first transplant at Nottingham. But it was as a breast surgeon that Blamey made his most significant contributions. He was opposed to what Elston calls “the barbaric” practice of intraoperative frozen section, in which a woman would wake up from surgery not knowing whether or not her breast had been removed. Instead, Blamey introduced preoperative diagnosis for the investigation of breast lesions, using needle core biopsy and fine needle aspiration cytology. He also pioneered the concept of breast conserving surgery and introduced specialist breast care nurses to his clinics.

Blamey was instrumental in establishing breast cancer screening in the UK. He was project leader in the 1980s for the UK Trial for Early Breast Cancer Detection and in the 1990s for the trial of the frequency of breast cancer screening conducted by the UK Coordinating Committee on Cancer Research. Blamey was the author of more than 350 scientific papers, and in 1990 he established the Nottingham international breast conference. His leadership positions also included vice president of the European Society of Mastology, president of what is now BASO—the Association for Cancer Surgery, and chairman of the BASO Breast Group, which is now the Association of Breast Surgery. He was a leading force in the 2003 opening of the Nottingham Breast Institute, which serves 35 000 patients each year.

Blamey leaves Norma, his wife of nearly 55 years; two daughters; and a son. Ned Stafford, Hamburg

References are in the version on thebmj.com.
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OBITUARIES

Louise Brueton (Cox)

Consultant clinical geneticist
Birmingham Women’s Hospital
(b 1961; q Royal Free Hospital
School of Medicine 1984; MD,
FRCP), died from wild type
gastrointestinal stromal tumour on
23 September 2014.
Louise Brueton went into paediatrics
before obtaining an MRC clinical
research fellowship at the Kennedy
Galton Centre at Northwick Park
Hospital, in the developing specialism
of molecular genetics. She was
appointed to a consultant post at the
centre in 1993, covering hospitals
in the North West Thames region,
before moving to work at Birmingham
Women’s Hospital in 2000. She
provided clinical genetics at several
district hospitals in the West Midlands
as well as developing specialist and
multidisciplinary clinics at Birmingham
Children’s Hospital. She remained
interested in research and is an author
on 77 published papers. She also
enjoyed teaching, and many trainees
in clinical genetics benefited from
her wisdom. Louise became ill in
2011. From the day she received her
diagnosis she knew what the eventual
outcome would be, but she bore her
illness with enormous strength and
courage. She leaves her family, friends,
and patients.

Dennis McComb Boyle

Consultant cardiologist
(b 1932; q Queen’s University,
Belfast, 1957; MD, FRCP, FRCPI, FACC, FESC),
d 28 August 2014.

Dennis McComb Boyle made major
contributions to the care of patients
with rheumatic valve disease and
cardiac disease in pregnancy. He
later became the first consultant
cardiologist in the Ulster Hospital in
Dundonald and initiated a mobile
coronary care service for east Belfast,
which dovetailed with the pioneering
unit set up by Frank Pantridge.
Although Dennis’s base was then
in east Belfast, he continued to be
responsible for all cardiac patients
in the Royal Maternity Hospital. He
travelled widely and conducted
numerous well controlled clinical
trials. He served on the council of the
Irish Cardiac Society and was later
president. As chairman of the local
chest heart and stroke association, he
helped young cardiologists to travel
abroad for further training. He leaves
Patricia, his wife of 48 years, and four
children.

John Anthony Parrish

General medical consultant
Mayday and Croydon general
hospitals, Croydon (b 1927;
q St Bartholomew’s 1951; MD,
FRCP), died from prostate cancer
on 12 October 2014.
After qualifying John Anthony
Parrish (“Tony”) joined the Royal
Army Medical Corps and served in
the Middle East, rising to the rank of
major. Tony married EJ, the younger
sister of his best friend, in 1958 and
the couple moved to Ann Arbor in
Michigan, US, for a year, while he
did a doctorate. They returned to live
in Barnet and then moved to Purley
when Tony took a post in Croydon.
Tony and EJ were famous for hosting
parties at their house. Tony enjoyed
playing sport, especially cricket and
golf, and watching a wide variety of
sports on television, right up until
the Ryder Cup in 2014. Predeceased
by EJ in 2001, Tony leaves three
children, Joan, his second wife;
two stepsons; and seven
grandchildren.

Aram Soli Rudenski

Former consultant chemical
pathologist (b 1956; q Clare College,
Cambridge/Lincoln College, Oxford,
1982; MA, DPhil, FRCPath),
d 31 August 2014.
Aram Soli Rudenski did house jobs
in Hastings and John Radcliffe
Infirmary. As a Medical Research
Council training fellow in Oxford,
he developed a highly influential
mathematical model of glucose
and insulin kinetics. He held
consultant posts in Bradford
(1999-2001) and at Salford Royal
Hospital (2001-11). An enthusiastic
teacher and gifted polymath, he
had rich cultural interests in the
arts and natural history. During
the AIDS crisis he gave his time
generously, undertaking substantial
voluntary work, especially for
OXAIDS. Involvement in the
Jewish community was of central
importance to him. Prostate cancer
diagnosed in 2011 forced him to
retire prematurely, which was a great
loss to Salford Royal. He leaves his
devoted partner, David.

David Kennedy

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James Ingram Watson

Retired general practitioner
(b 1939; q Glasgow 1963;
DObst RCOG), died from
vascular dementia and
Parkinson’s disease on
7 July 2014.
After qualifying James Ingram
Watson accepted a post at Glasgow
Royal Infirmary but then decided
to have a year in general practice
first. He spent a very happy year
in Peebles, decided to stay in
general practice, and took up an
appointment in Perth in 1965,
where he stayed until he retired in
2000. During that time he saw huge
changes. By the time he retired,
not only did the surgery employ
numerous receptionists and nurses,
but, as the senior partner and
business partner, he had overseen
the building of two new surgeries,
one in Perth and a branch surgery
in Scone. Apart from work, Jim had
many interests, including hill walking
and classical music. He leaves his
wife, Marjory, and three daughters
from a previous marriage.

Lenny Burnett

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