Merton Sandler, consultant chemical pathologist and professor of chemical pathology (b 1926; q Manchester University Medical School 1949; FRCP, MD, FRCPath, FRCpsych), died from cancer on 24 August 2014

Merton Sandler, one of the first to link concentrations of chemicals in the brain to depression, was an energetic pioneer in psychopharmacology, whose work contributed to the development of early antidepressants. In 1959 Sandler and Michael Pare published research suggesting that by blocking the enzyme monoamine oxidase in the brain it was possible to boost levels of serotonin and other monoamines—an action that could be helpful in the treatment of depression. Sandler’s enthusiasm led him to smuggle— for research purposes—an illegal drug into Britain from behind the Iron Curtain, and to test a monoamine inhibitor—reserpine—on himself. He experienced “mild psychosis for a month.”

Former colleagues say that his considerable energy, and a conviviality and warmth that encouraged collaboration, were major contributors to his success. Vivette Glover, professor of perinatal psychiatry at Imperial College London and a long time collaborator, said: “There is no doubt that his personality played quite a large part in his achievement. He was interested in people and mentored and supported many young researchers and clinicians. He was funny and people liked him because—unlike many scientists of that period—he preferred collaborating to competition.”

Born into an observant Jewish family in Salford, Sandler won a scholarship to Manchester Grammar before attending Manchester University Medical School. During his national service he was provided with a small hospital laboratory on the basis of his pathology training. With few formal duties, he and Pare had the time to pursue their own research interests.

Interviewed at an American College of Neuropsychopharmacology conference in 1998, Sandler reflected that this “accidental” entry into what was to become the world of psychopharmacology was to characterise his working life. “My whole career has been shaped by expediency and opportunism and the jobs that were available,” he said. Glover put it another way: “All the way through his career he had a nose for sniffing out interesting and unfashionable areas to work in, but they all involved monoamines.”

On leaving the army he worked as a senior research pathologist at the Royal Free Hospital in north London, and as a lecturer in chemical pathology at the hospital’s medical school. In 1958 he was appointed consultant chemical pathologist at Queen Charlotte’s Hospital, part of the University of London. This was to remain his base for four decades. Sandler found that the position provided him with the time and resources to continue his groundbreaking work in psychopharmacology.

Glover says: “Queen Charlotte was a marvellous job for him. He had a theory about serotonin and pre-eclampsia. Within six months he disproved his own theory but had the job that gave him total freedom to do whatever he wanted for the rest of his life. The actual chemical pathology was done by two or three very capable people and he looked over it two or three times a year.”

Gerald Stern, the leading neurologist who worked with Sandler on research suggesting that the monoamine deprenyl could be helpful in the treatment of people with Parkinson’s disease, describes his first visit to Sandler’s base “as a real eye opener.”

It was his collaboration with Stern that saw Sandler turn drug mule. They were researching the potential role of deprenyl, a selective inhibitor of monoamine oxidase. It had been identified as a possible treatment for Parkinson’s but was not legal in Britain. The team relied on securing a one-off supply from a pioneering researcher who was based in Budapest.

Stern says it was agreed that Sandler was the most “innocent” member of the team, so “he went off to buy a white overcoat with capacious pockets.” The smuggling succeeded, as did the team’s research efforts to show the potential benefits in treating Parkinson’s. As Stern concludes: “He took supposedly obtuse neurochemistry and turned it into practical results.”

“Following where the monoamines led,” as he described it, Sandler’s collaborations investigated their effect in alcoholism and substance misuse, schizophrenia, and migraine, as well as Parkinson’s and his breakthroughs around depression.

The role of monoamines in psychiatric disorders during pregnancy and post partum was one of Sandler’s key research interests. In 1979 new mother Claire Depeche approached him about possible support for women—like her—affected by postnatal depression. Depeche, who was interested in chemical pathology, had read a book edited by Sandler about the role of monoamines in psychiatric disorders during the puerperium. Sandler worked with her to form the Association for Post-Natal Illness, becoming the organisation’s first—and so far only—president, and contributing energetically to its launch and work.

In 1973 the University of London appointed him professor of chemical pathology, but he remained at Queen Charlotte’s. He continued his research work there on an honorary basis for a decade after he retired in 1991 and the university appointed him emeritus professor.

Sandler’s eagerness for collaboration and networking contributed to his support for clever clinicians and researchers in the Soviet bloc, frustrated by both anti-Semitism and a lack of resources—which sometimes went hand in hand. Many of those he helped gain exit visas became prominent figures in psychopharmacology or psychiatry in the West. His daughter, Dido Sandler, says: “He was keen to help those Jewish scientists at a time when there was anti-Semitism, but he also recognised clever people who had something to offer.”

His work occasionally provided fodder for the media. When he and his colleagues studied trace amine metabolism in two groups of prisoners at Wormwood Scrubs, they found an overproduction of phenylethylamine in aggressive psychopaths. The resulting media coverage ended their access to the prisoners. This was only restored when the Home Secretary was lobbied by a junior minister—whom Sandler had cajoled at a dinner party. Another example, his former colleagues say, of how his enthusiasm, warmth, and conviviality benefited his work.

Sandler leaves his wife, Lorna; and his children, Martin, Nick, Livy, and Dido. Chris Mahony, London

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Gillian Mary Crampton

Former general practitioner, Carters Green Medical Centre, West Bromwich (b 1955; q Birmingham 1979), d 17 October 2014.

Gillian Mary Crampton (née Taylor) grew up in Malvern. She did her house jobs at Sandwell General Hospital in West Bromwich before training to become a general practitioner at Carters Green Medical Centre, where she was proud to have worked until her retirement in March 2014. Gill was heavily involved with the primary care trust, being the chair of its professional executive committee, and she contributed to the training of countless GP registrars over her career of 32 years. She was passionate about the local area and its people. Her outside interests included cooking, gardening, horse riding, and travel. She was a keen West Bromwich Albion supporter. She leaves her husband, Andy, and their three sons.

Joanne Weller
Cite this as: BMJ 2014;349:g6857

Charles Robert Dundas

Former consultant anaesthetist Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and senior clinical lecturer University of Aberdeen (b 1934; q Edinburgh 1959; FFARCS, FRCP Glas), died from metastatic hepatobiliary carcinoma on 3 October 2014.

Charles Robert Dundas (“Bertie”) did research into aspects of anaesthesia in high atmospheric pressure environments and administered one of the world’s first hyperbaric general anaesthetics to human volunteers in a chamber saturation dive. Bertie was also a founding member of offshore medical emergency teams while the North Sea diving industry was in its infancy, and he flew out to attend the 1988 Piper Alpha disaster. After retiring from the university in early 1990 he volunteered his services during the 1991 Gulf War. Appointed as consultant anaesthetist in the rank of lieutenant colonel, and then officer commanding of the resuscitation department in Riyadh, he served as one of the oldest in uniform. He leaves a wife, Valerie; three children; and three grandchildren.

Sinclair Dundas, Valerie Flook
Cite this as: BMJ 2014;349:g7357

Louis Solomon

Emeritus professor of orthopaedic surgery University of Bristol (b 1928; q University of Cape Town 1951; MD), d 19 August 2014.

Louis Solomon undertook specialist training in orthopaedic surgery at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, London, between 1957 and 1962. In 1962–63 he had an Arthritis Council fellowship at the Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston. Throughout this time, he also worked to obtain a doctorate in medicine (MD), which he was awarded in 1963 from the University of Cape Town. In 1967 he was appointed professor of orthopaedic surgery at the University of Witwatersrand, where he received an award for being the most distinguished teacher. He was honoured with many other awards and sat on the editorial board of the Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery. A prolific published author, Louis was well known for his expertise in arthritis and trained and developed countless successful orthopaedic surgeons who now practise all over the world.

Evert Smith
Cite this as: BMJ 2014;349:g7359

Brian Gerard Haggart

General surgeon Walton and Fazakerley hospitals, Liverpool (b 1928; q Liverpool 1951; FRCS, ChM), died from lung cancer on 31 January 2014.

Brian Gerard Haggart was a house officer at the Stanley and Whiston hospitals from 1951 to 1952 and was appointed as a consultant surgeon in Liverpool in 1965. He retired in 1989. In 2013 he received a certificate of life membership from the Liverpool Medical Institution. Brian Haggart was a committed Catholic and was active in CAFOD (the official Catholic aid agency) in Liverpool for several years. His academic interests included astronomy, physics, and philosophy. More prosaic interests included storytelling (of the Tommy Cooper variety), The Daily Telegraph cryptic crossword (which he completed most days), and chess. He leaves his wife, Columba Haggart (née Gilleran), whom he married in 1955; his sister, Pauline; a daughter; four sons; and 11 grandchildren.

Anthony Haggart, Linda de Cossart, Fergus O’Connor
Cite this as: BMJ 2014;349:g7356

Doris Helen Sankarayya

General practitioner Birmingham (b 1931; q Birmingham 1958), d 9 September 2014.

Doris Helen Sankarayya (née Pereira) obtained a degree in bacteriology at Bombay University. She started her medical studies in Birmingham in 1952, and it was here that she met her husband to be, Bob. She completed her house appointments in Solihull and Birmingham and then accompanied her husband, who was posted to Aden on national service. She did sessional work in mother and infant clinics and also in “up-country” Lahej for the World Health Organization. Doris and Bob entered general practice with her father in law in Birmingham. In 1975 they moved locally to develop a newly built health centre in Bartley Green, which later included three further partners. She also worked for the Family Planning Association for some years. Doris retired in 1991. She leaves Bob, two children, and three grandchildren.

Bob Sankarayya, Ash Sankarayya, Rekha Fowler
Cite this as: BMJ 2014;349:g6860

Christopher Michael Wragg

General practitioner and accident and emergency doctor (b 1952; q 1976; DRCOG, DTM & H, DCH), died from hepatocellular carcinoma on 20 September 2014.

Christopher Michael Wragg was the life and soul of every party (usually coming in fancy dress or one of his many Victorian outfits), but he never drank alcohol. He liked rugby and went on to become a passionate rugby league supporter. He was potty about history, especially medical and military history, and started to collect paraphernalia and memorabilia even as a student. In the early 1980s, he settled in Kirton in Lindsey, initially as a GP. Later, he took a staff grade post in Scunthorpe A&E, which he gave up because of ill health. He bore his diabetes, blindness, and final illness with his unique mix of joviality, spirituality, and resignation. For many, the memory of Wraggy will live on in joy.

Laurence Wood
Cite this as: BMJ 2014;349:g7360