



Paul Antoine (“Tom”) Voûte

Pioneer of paediatric oncology

In the 1960s Tom Voûte, then a junior doctor studying paediatrics at Amsterdam’s Emma Children’s Hospital, was being shown around a ward by a senior nursing sister. The nurse gestured towards a boy, declaring: “This one is destined to become an angel.” It was a time when the chances of children with cancer being cured were less than 30%. But Voûte found it “impossible” to accept that cancer could not be cured—he wanted to know more.

This was his first patient in a career that laid the foundations for paediatric oncology in the Netherlands. He became the professional and public face of the fight against childhood cancer and enjoyed seeing a measurable degree of success in his lifetime. On his retirement in 2001 the chances of being cured had risen to more than 70%. He had predicted, 10 years earlier, that all childhood cancers would be treatable by the time he retired. He explained this as “optimism,” without which there can be no perspective.

Voûte had originally wanted to be a sailor. The medical profession can thank his father for persuading him instead to study medicine at Utrecht University. He qualified as a paediatrician in 1968 and began work at the Emma Children’s Hospital, later to become part of Amsterdam’s Academic Medical Centre. He also studied paediatrics and oncology in Paris under the pioneering Odile Schweisguth, and in 1982

became the first Dutch professor of paediatric oncology at the University of Amsterdam. He was also a founding member of the International Society of Paediatric Oncology.

He is credited with improving the prognosis for children, especially those with cancer of the kidney, bone cancer, and neuroblastoma, the second most common childhood tumour. He was also concerned with the long term effects of cancer treatment, and set up a polyclinic addressing the later effects of paediatric oncology such as infertility and disrupted growth. Meanwhile he coauthored dozens of academic papers on paediatric oncology and edited *Cancer in Children: Clinical Management*, published by Oxford University Press. On retirement he chaired the Children Cancer Free organisation, or KIKA, promoting research projects into paediatric oncology. The Dutch Cancer Society awarded him the Muntendam prize for his contribution to paediatric oncology, describing him as the “éminence grise in the world of combating childhood cancer.”

His successor at the medical centre, Professor Huib Caron, believes he helped to change the passive attitude of doctors in the 1950s and ’60s towards childhood cancer in which children were seen as destined to die. “He changed that to ‘we must do all we can and bring new things to treatment.’”

Caron also highlights his “tireless work” in improving international cooperation between centres of paediatric oncology in researching better treatments. “He saw right from the start that this was crucial.” With 500 cases a year and 20 different diagnoses, the numbers in the Netherlands alone were too small: “we had to work with others to improve.”

Yet apart from his clinical and academic work he was aware of the psychosocial aspects of childhood cancers. He was one of the founders of a scheme to allow parents to remain close to their children through staying in a so called Ronald McDonald House attached to the medical centre, a scheme which has been copied elsewhere in Europe. He was also involved in an annual holiday camp for children with cancer and in setting up, in 1992, the Cliniclowns, a circus act visiting hospitals.

Early in his career he embraced the pub-

licity, and fundraising opportunities, that treating childhood cancer inevitably brought with it. By 1974 he had become associated in the public mind with childhood cancer as one of the initiators of the Giving for Living appeal, which raised 65 million guilders—around £25 million—to set up four centres for paediatric oncology in the Netherlands.

Working in the glare of publicity could also have its downside. In one of his regular television appearances he caused a furore in the 1980s by arguing that children under 18 who had fought cancer for years and were now inevitably going to die should be allowed a real possibility of euthanasia.

“This was typical Tom,” explained Caron, “his directness, his concern in taking up a position he thought was good and important.” He added: “Tom was driven, hard working, and motivating but also impatient, direct, and averse to hierarchies. The thing with Tom is that he always got away with it: he wanted the best for his patients.”

His patients appeared to appreciate it. He is remembered as a doctor with enormous round spectacles who joked that he must “take a look here because I think I heard a frog in your tummy.” Under his charge the paediatric oncology department at the Emma Hospital was described as a bustling, colourful place with parents present, a school, and patients regarded as normal children with an illness rather than as sick children. He recently wrote to one former patient: “Every child is an individual that must be approached as a person. You may adapt your choice of words so as to be understood within the age group but that is all.”

In retirement he remained active in medicine. He was involved in trying to set up a department of paediatric oncology in a hospital in Jakarta in Indonesia and helped to launch the Corpus museum in Leiden—a giant model of the human body where visitors can take a journey through the body’s organs.

He leaves a wife, Marian; three children; and five grandchildren.

Tony Sheldon

Paul Antoine (“Tom”) Voûte, former professor in paediatric oncology, University of Amsterdam (b 1936; q Utrecht 1963), died on 26 August 2008 after a fall at his home.

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**Raj Kumari Ahuja
(née Khanna)**



Former general practitioner Wigan (b 1938; q MGM Medical College, Indore, India, 1962; DTM&H), died from pancreatic cancer on 9 July 2008. On moving to England in 1965, Raj Kumari Ahuja (née Khanna) planned to specialise in gynaecology at Billinge Hospital, Wigan. But after bearing two children, she joined her husband in general practice, where she remained for 28 years until her retirement in 1998 on health grounds. She developed her own practice, became the lead general practitioner, and audited other practices. She was also a medical officer in family planning, president of the Wigan division of the BMA, and active in the Overseas Doctors' Association (ODA). She leaves a husband, Satish; two children; and three grandchildren.

S K Ahuja

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Leo Joseph Dolan



Former general practitioner Manchester (b 1927; q Manchester 1951; DObstRCOG, MRCP), died suddenly at the wheel of his car from acute myocardial ischaemia on 9 May 2008.

After graduating, Leo Dolan did his national service in the Royal Air Force in Egypt, where he looked after Italian ex-prisoners of war. He thus learnt Italian, later becoming fluent in Italian, French, and Spanish,

including reading the gospels; he was a devout Catholic and member of Opus Dei. He first practised in Romiley, near Manchester, and then worked in partnership with a Jewish doctor in Crumpsall, north Manchester, for 35 years. He was founder chairman of the Ashley Educational Trust, which still runs a student residence in the university quarter of Manchester. He leaves a wife, Dorothy; four children; and 12 grandchildren.

Anthony Clift

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2008;337:a1833

Graham Hugh Farrington



Former consultant general surgeon Kingston Hospital NHS Trust, Surrey (b 1934; q Leeds 1958, FRCS, MChir), d 30 August 2008.

Graham Hugh Farrington's junior posts were in and around East Anglia before he was appointed to the surgical rotation at St George's Hospital, Tooting. In 1971 he was appointed general surgical consultant to Kingston Hospital, retiring in 1994. He was a research fellow in pulmonary responses to shock and sepsis at Harvard University Medical School in 1969, but his main interest was paediatric surgery, in particular for undescended testes. With C G Scorer he co-wrote two books on congenital deformities and anomalies of the testis (1971 and 1979). He was commissioning officer for a new surgical wing at Kingston Hospital in 1976. He never married.

Robin D Leach

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**Ruth Fleminger
(née Jackson)**

Former consultant psychiatrist St Bernard's Hospital, Ealing (b 1922; q University College



Hospital, London, 1945; DPM, FRCPsych, MA), d 23 January 2008.

Ruth Fleminger (née Jackson) spent the early post-war years as a medical officer with the United Nations helping refugees return to their homelands. Back in London working at Anna Freud's nursery, she became interested in psychological aspects of medicine and in 1950 started training in psychiatry at the Maudsley. Here she met her husband and left medicine to concentrate on her family. In 1967 she became consultant psychiatrist at Springfield Hospital and South London Hospital for Women, and later St Bernard's Hospital. After retiring in 1985, she obtained an MA in art history. She leaves a husband, John; five children; and 13 grandchildren.

John Fleminger

Simon Fleminger

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2008;337:a1839

Chi Kai Koo



Consultant radiologist Darent Valley Hospital, Dartford (b 1963; q Liverpool 1988; MRCP, FRCR), died from metastatic nasopharyngeal carcinoma on 5 June 2008.

Chi Kai Koo ("Koo") was born in Hong Kong to a family that had fled from China in 1949. He gained his MRCP in 1993 and then trained as a radiologist in Glasgow. He joined Darent Valley Hospital as a consultant in 2000 to set up the magnetic resonance imaging

(MRI) department, which he did in an exemplary way. In the region he was closely involved with the Kent Cancer Network. Diagnosed with metastatic nasopharyngeal cancer in 2005, Koo continued working throughout several courses of chemoradiotherapy. He never married and leaves his parents and three siblings.

Jackie Kirk, Inaam Abdelhadi

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2008;337:a1730

**Joseph Olusola
Ayodeji Omotayo**



Locum consultant psychiatrist Liverpool (b 1964; q Lagos College of Medicine, Nigeria, 1989; DPM), died from hepatoma on 9 May 2008.

Joe Olusola Ayodeji Omotayo trained in psychiatry in Merseyside and spent most of his career in the Liverpool area. A talented psychiatrist, he worked for many years as a locum consultant. His commitment to his patients and his support for his colleagues was unfailing. In his last years he endured liver transplantation, complications, and metastases, his attitude to his illness being an inspiration. He continued to work to his usual high standard until shortly before his death. He leaves a partner and two children from his former marriage.

Rob Poole, Robert Higgo

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