



DAVID BRITTAIN

## Aileen Joy Plant (née Parnell)

Outstanding leader in global public health

Aileen Plant was a leading Australian infectious diseases epidemiologist who played a key part in controlling Vietnam's outbreak of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) in 2003. She was professor of international health at Curtin University of Technology, Perth, and collapsed at Jakarta airport returning from a World Health Organization (WHO) meeting on bird flu.

WHO was quick in issuing glowing tributes recognising her international work on its behalf, from Africa to Asia. The director general, Margaret Chan, wrote in an email to WHO staff: "She never hesitated to travel to the places she was needed. And we needed her, many, many times, in extremely challenging situations. She brought a deep sense of duty, commitment, vast experience, ethics, courage, and professionalism to her work."

In 2003 the Vietnamese government awarded Aileen the "people's medal for health" for her work leading WHO's SARS team in Vietnam. Her predecessor, Dr Carlo Urbani, died after becoming infected when investigating the outbreak.

"Vietnam was the first country in the world to control SARS, and my team

played a major role in the investigation, early epidemiology, and control methods for SARS," she wrote in her CV. Aileen often emphasised that the achievement was a team effort and praised the Vietnamese doctors and nurses who worked through the outbreak under difficult conditions. "It's those people who really controlled SARS," she told one radio interviewer.

Aileen, who was also a consultant to World Bank projects in China, is warmly remembered for her ability to make friends and to work with others. Her CV listed her team building abilities as a key attribute.

"I provide unique and rapid team building skills in outbreak situations where the requirement is to undertake research and control methods in a very short time," she said. "In what are sometimes dangerous and usually politically fraught situations, team building is of paramount importance."

She was dismissive of the personal risks of her work. "It would be a nuisance to die and I'm not planning it," she told a journalist preparing a magazine profile in 2004.

Aileen was born in the Victorian country town of Warrigal, the fourth of eight children. Her parents had a car dealership and petrol station. When she was 13, the family moved to a farm near Denmark on the south coast of Western Australia.

She left school at 14 to work in a bank, and later completed high school. In her early 20s she began a medical degree at the University of Western Australia.

She worked at Charles Gairdner Hospital in Perth and then at the Royal Darwin Hospital before undertaking a diploma of tropical medicine and hygiene in London. She returned to Darwin as chief medical officer and deputy secretary of the Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services from 1989 to 1992. Her work in the Northern Territory engendered a lifelong commitment to Aboriginal health.

Throughout her career, Aileen sought a balance between policy and research, describing as a professional highlight her role as founding director of the master of applied epidemiology programme at the Australian National University.

Its graduates now fill key positions in Australia and internationally.

Aileen was also instrumental in establishing the Australian Biosecurity Cooperative Research Centre, of which she was deputy director. Professor John Mackenzie, the centre's director, said: "Her compassion, her common touch treating everyone the same, her decisive mind, her professionalism, her commitment, her sense of humour and her wide perspective all contribute to a great Australian and an unsung hero of our times."

In her first year of medical studies, Aileen married a fellow student, Roger Plant. They divorced not long after graduation, but their families remained close.

At the funeral and memorial service, attended by several hundred people in Perth on 13 April, Aileen's talent for friendship was celebrated as much as her professional achievements.

In his eulogy, Professor John Mathews, a professorial fellow at the University of Melbourne, said: "She was greatly admired for her idealism and commitment, her integrity, her empathy, her humility, her energy, her originality, and the breadth and depth of her intellect."

"These personal qualities, together with her capacity to work round problems, and problem people, underpinned her many achievements. She was also great fun to be with."

Aileen was known for having an "inbuilt bullshit detector." Several friends, knowing Aileen's wicked sense of humour, said she would have appreciated the irony of dying in a departure lounge and having a memorial service on Friday the 13th.

Aileen loved cooking and music, and had an interest in tarot cards and creative writing. She had begun a novel based on her SARS experiences in Vietnam.

**Melissa Sweet**

Aileen Joy Plant, professor of international health, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia (b 1948; q Perth 1977; DTM&H, MPH, PhD), died from acute haemorrhagic pancreatitis on 27 March 2007.

## Susan Margaret Coupe



General practitioner Morningside, Edinburgh (b 1954; q Dundee 1978; FFARCS, MRCP), died from disseminated bowel cancer on 6 February 2007.

Sue Coupe began training in anaesthetics and after passing her anaesthetic fellowship moved to Edinburgh to follow her husband's medical career. At the time there was little prospect of flexible training in anaesthetics, so Sue completed her vocational training and moved into general practice—a decision she never regretted. She had 14 happy years as a partner in general practice. Sue loved Italy and was an “enthusiastic” driver, golfer, and organiser of friends and family. She leaves a husband, Tom Marshall, and three children.

**Tom Marshall**

## Cyril Andrew Haxton



Former general practitioner Clacton on sea (b 1921; q Edinburgh 1944; MRCOG), d 8 March 2007.

After service in the Royal Army Medical Corps, Cyril Haxton moved to Clacton in 1953 to join a general practitioner as his junior partner. Specialising in gynaecology and obstetrics, he worked in the maternity home and local hospital in Clacton. He also had an interest in psychiatry, and was part of a multidisciplinary panel working at Severalls Hospital based in Colchester. He was a

member of Colchester Medical Society. On retiring in the mid-1980s, when the practice had grown to seven partners, Cyril pursued his interest in information technology and remained a keen fly fisherman. He leaves three daughters and four grandchildren.

**Ali Haxton**

## Norah Marion Hudson



Former consultant radiologist Glenfield Hospital Leicester (b 1938; q Royal Free Hospital 1962; FFR), died from endometrial cancer on 25 January 2007.

Norah successfully adjusted her professional life to the demands of her family and her husband's academic career moves. Her postgraduate training was in the USA, Oxford, and Leicester, where she was appointed consultant radiologist in 1973. She quickly developed an interest in cardiac radiology and established a reputation for the rapid retrieval of catheters, wires, and stents left behind in the body. She helped to set up and was director of an excellent cardiac radioisotope service. Outside medicine, with her family, Norah enjoyed gardening, travelling, and long walks. She leaves a husband, John; three sons; and seven grandchildren.

**Peter Hubner**

## Graham Frank Joplin

Emeritus professor of endocrinology Hammersmith Hospital, University of London (b 1927; q University of New Zealand, 1951; MD, FRCP, FRACP), died from Parkinson's disease on 4 December 2006.

Graham Joplin came to the Postgraduate Medical School in 1955, where he rapidly impressed



## William Keith Campbell Morgan

Former professor of respiratory medicine University of Western Ontario (b 1929; q Sheffield 1953; FRCPed, FRCPC, FACP), died from a ruptured aortic aneurysm on 23 March 2007.

Keith Morgan's reputation rested on three foundations: his clinical skills, his leadership of research into occupational lung disease, and his sometimes acerbic wit. After early years in Baltimore, during which his most famous paper, “The rape of the phallus,” antagonised surgeons who made a living from circumcision, he headed the Appalachian Laboratory for Occupational Lung Disease, setting up a major research programme into pneumoconioses. At the University of Western Ontario, Keith continued as teacher, researcher, and clinician, serving as president of the Canadian Thoracic Society and later chief of staff at the University Hospital in London, Ontario. Predeceased by his wife, Barbara, he leaves three children.

**Anthony Seaton**

## Michael Alexander McDonald

Former specialist in occupational medicine (b 1927; q Westminster Hospital, London, 1953; DOBstRCOG, DIH, FFOM), died from complications following nephroureterectomy and radical cystoprostatectomy on 17 March 2007.

In the Royal Air Force during 1955-8 Michael McDonald was squadron leader pathologist to RAF Hospital Akrotiri, where he studied the biggest recorded epidemic of foodborne tonsillitis. He was 17 years in general practice and with the Harlow Industrial Health Service, entering full time occupational medicine in 1972 and ending his career as chief medical officer at the Post Office (1981-7). There he produced a widely used education programme on the early detection and management of alcoholism in industry. In retirement he was a voluntary guide at York Minster for 16 years. He leaves a wife, Anne.

**Anne McDonald**

## Henry Proctor

Former consultant orthopaedic surgeon Birmingham Accident Hospital (b 1910, q Durham/St Bartholomew's Hospital 1938; FRCSed), died from pneumonia after surgery to repair a fractured neck of femur on 1 April 2007. Henry Proctor (“Harry”) served as graded surgeon in the Royal Army Medical Corps in the Middle East and Palestine 1941-5. He was consultant orthopaedic surgeon at the Birmingham Accident Hospital 1951-75, forming and being chairman of the Head Injury Trust and Head Injury Work Centre. A member of the BMA for 65 years, he was joint author of *Principles for First Aid for the Injured*. After retirement Harry worked with the Birmingham Road Injuries Research Group. Predeceased by his first wife, Jean, in 1973, he leaves his second wife, Joan; two children; and four grandchildren.

**Henry S Proctor**