

## Michael Latham

Global nutrition expert and breast feeding advocate

As a child Michael Latham knew exactly what he wanted to do in life. Growing up in the 1930s in Tanganyika, now part of Tanzania, and speaking both his native English and Swahili, he was a keen observer of his father, a doctor in the British colonial service. “From early childhood my goal was always to attend medical school and then to return to Tanzania to do the kind of exciting and humanitarian medical and public health work that as a schoolboy in Africa I saw my father doing,” he recently wrote. “To this day, I think that my most meaningful, educational and significant job was in the six years I spent as a ‘Bush Doctor’ running a hospital, doing surgery, obstetrics, and everything—and being responsible for the public health services in a large district.”

### Fluent Swahili

He left Tanzania in 1964 to teach at Harvard University School of Public Health and in 1968 joined Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. But for the rest of his life he regularly visited Africa, never wavering in his battle to improve nutrition and healthcare on the continent he loved and in other underdeveloped regions of the world. Malden Nesheim, provost emeritus and professor of nutrition emeritus at Cornell, described his friend as “warm and friendly,” adding, “He cared deeply about his students, and the village people he worked with in developing countries. I visited a Masai village in Kenya with Michael back in the 1970s. He spoke fluent Swahili, and it was impressive to see the respect and concern he had for the people in the village. He never forgot his early roots in east Africa.”

Latham, a lifelong advocate of breast feeding, is perhaps best known for his fierce opposition to the marketing practices of international companies to promote infant formula in the developing world. During the 1970s, he helped lead a boycott of Swiss giant Nestlé, a leading supplier of infant formula. “In my view, this promotion has been unethical and immoral,” he said in 1978. “My interpretation of the scientific evidence leaves absolutely no doubt in my mind, first, that bottle feeding is a major cause of morbidity and mortality in developing countries and, second, that the promotion of formulas by corporations such as Nestlé’s has contributed significantly to this most tragic of problems.”

Health groups led by the World Health Organization in 1981 developed the international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes as guidelines for private firms. In 1991 Latham cofounded the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action to promote breastfeeding.

Latham made other important contributions to global healthcare, including research in micronutrient deficiencies, especially iron deficiency anemia and vitamin A. With his wife, Dr Lani Stephenson, he studied the effects of parasites, such as roundworm, schistosomiasis, and hookworm, on nutritional needs of children and workers in Africa.

Professor Nesheim noted that many of Latham’s students are now in senior positions in international agencies and governments around the world, adding, “His students are incredibly loyal to him and have a big impact on international assistance policies.”

His former doctor of philosophy student Olivia Yambi, head of Unicef in Kenya, said, “His greatest delight was to see his students return to their home countries and contribute to national development.” Another of his students, Godwin Ndossi, head of the Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre and who travelled with Latham in the Tanzanian bush, said, “Michael would easily pull a crowd of older people as he would schoolchildren, engaging them on issues that mattered to them. He spent many hours examining children for all sorts of health conditions and providing on the spot advice to local medical teams. Michael often brought small presents for children and they just loved him.”



**During the 1970s, he helped lead a boycott of Swiss giant Nestlé, a leading supplier of infant formula. “In my view, this promotion has been unethical and immoral,” he said in 1978**

Michael Charles Latham was born on 6 May 1928 in the Kilosa district of Tanzania. He studied at Dublin University, earning his bachelors degree in 1949 and medical degree in 1952. After training in the United Kingdom and the United States he returned to Tanzania in 1955 as first medical officer in the Ministry of Health, later becoming director of nutrition. During home leaves he studied at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, earning an advanced degree in 1958. He earned a masters degree in 1965 in public health and nutrition at Harvard and in 1968 moved to Cornell as the first international nutrition professor in the US. He frequently served

as consultant in Africa, Asia, and Latin America for the World Health Organization, the United Nations, and the World Bank.

### Nuclear disarmament

Latham, an early supporter of nuclear disarmament in the 1950s and opponent of the Vietnam war in the 1960s, was arrested in the 1980s for leading demonstrations at Cornell against apartheid in South Africa. In 1965 he was awarded the Order of the British Empire. His many other honours include the title of “living legend” at the international congress of nutrition in 2009 in Bangkok.

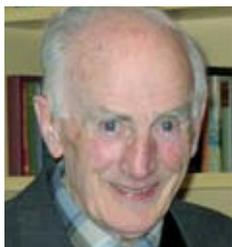
Latham retired in 2004 as Cornell professor emeritus and graduate school professor, remaining active writing research papers and travelling. In addition to his wife, he leaves two sons.

### Ned Stafford

Michael Latham, nutritionalist (b 1928; q 1952, Dublin), died on 1 April 2011 from pneumonia.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2011;342:d2969

**Hugh Cooper Barr**



Former general practitioner Penrith, Cumbria (b 1923; q Edinburgh 1951; FRCGP), died on 27 October 2010 from a myocardial infarction.

Hugh Cooper Barr flew Beaufighters during the second world war. As a student he won the gold medal for anatomy. After posts in Cumberland Infirmary, Carlisle, and Simpson Maternity Hospital, Edinburgh, he joined a practice in Penrith, where he remained until his retirement in 1986. One of the first GP trainers in east Cumbria, Hugh was founding provost of the Cumbria branch of the Royal College of General Practitioners. He was instrumental in establishing BASICS in Penrith, and in promoting GP maternity care. Passionate about medicine, he became passionate about gardening, the garden he created with his wife, Margaret, being featured on BBC *Gardeners' World*. He was particularly interested in Alpine plants. He leaves Margaret and three children.

**Robert Barr**

*Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d2675*

**Margaret Elizabeth Barton**



Former consultant paediatrician East Birmingham, Solihull, and Marston Green Hospitals (b 1926; q Middlesex Hospital, London, 1947; MA, MD, FRCPEd), d 11 January 2011.

After qualifying, Margaret Elizabeth Barton worked in London, Wolverhampton, Hereford, and Newcastle before returning to the West Midlands in 1961. After a

second period at Wolverhampton, she transferred to Birmingham Children's Hospital, in 1964 becoming consultant paediatrician at East Birmingham, Solihull, and Marston Green Hospitals. Margaret retired in 1989, noting in her account of her life and work that the paediatric service was well established and integrated into the medical school. She moved to the Forest of Dean, where she had been born and brought up, and was clerk to the Parish Council and had a wide circle of friends and interests. She leaves a sister and a brother.

**Helen Kegie**

*Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d2847*

**James Frew**



Former general practitioner Wickford, Essex (b 1924; q Cambridge/St Thomas' Hospital, London, 1948; DObstRCOG), d 3 May 2010.

James Frew wanted to be a general practitioner from an early age. He was a house officer at St Thomas' Hospital, London, when the NHS started in 1948, and did his national service at Bramcote Naval Air Station in Warwickshire—as far from the sea as it is possible to be in the UK. After demobilisation, he trained in obstetrics and gynaecology before joining his father and elder brother, Thomas, in the family practice in Wickford, Essex, where he worked for over 40 years. James had a keen interest in photography and natural history, keeping bees for many years. In retirement he took up glass engraving. He leaves a wife, Elsie, and three sons.

**Anthony Frew**

*Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d2846*

**Robert Neilson Johnston**

Former consultant respiratory physician Dundee (b 1921; q Aberdeen 1943; MD, FRCPEd, FRCP), d 30 October 2010.



Robert Neilson Johnston became interested in respiratory medicine after treating tuberculosis in West Africa with the Royal Army Medical Corps. He trained at the Brompton Hospital, London, and Bellevue, New York, and was appointed consultant in Dundee in 1956. As tuberculosis declined, he developed a service in Tayside for asthma, lung cancer, and chronic obstructive lung disease. He helped to plan the future shape of respiratory services in Scotland and was president of the Scottish Thoracic Society, as well as helping to train the new generation of thoracic physicians. His many qualities included integrity, wisdom, sound clinical judgment, industry, decency, and loyalty, with a ready sense of humour. He leaves his second wife, Elizabeth; three children; and seven grandchildren.

**J S Legge**

*Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d2845*

**John Douglas Mitchell**



Consultant neurologist Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and honorary professor Lancaster University (b 1951; q Aberdeen 1975), died from oesophageal cancer on 13 February 2011.

Having qualified with numerous awards and distinctions, John Douglas Mitchell ("Douglas") trained in Cambridge and Edinburgh before being appointed consultant neurologist in Preston in 1986. He became honorary professor at the University of Central Lancashire in

1993 and at Lancaster University in 2011. His contributions to motor neurone disease included setting up the first UK multidisciplinary care and research facility, helping to formulate the diagnostic criteria, and participating in a multicentre trial of riluzole, the first drug licensed to modify the disease. He contributed widely to the Cochrane Database on neuromuscular disease and migraine, and held various high profile posts in the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. He leaves a wife, Christine, and two daughters.

**Alastair Campbell**

*Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d2837*

**William Mackie Ross**



Former head of radiotherapy Newcastle General Hospital (b 1922; q Durham 1945; CBE, TD, DL, MD), d 15 March 2011.

After house officer appointments, William Mackie Ross ("Bill") served for two years in the Royal Army Medical Corps. On demobilisation, he returned to Newcastle to work in the department of radiotherapy, rapidly becoming consultant. Hardworking, dedicated, hugely efficient, and clinically and administratively able, Bill accepted a massive burden of clinical and administrative responsibility throughout his professional life. He served with distinction in the Territorial Army, becoming commanding officer in No 1 (Northern) General Hospital TA in 1966. He was also president of the Royal College of Radiologists during 1983-6, then becoming secretary to the Conference of Medical Royal Colleges (later the Academy). Predeceased by Mary, his wife of more than 60 years, he leaves three children and five grandchildren.

**Walton of Detchant**

*Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d2842*