

Leon Eisenberg

Transformed child psychiatry by advocating research into developmental problems

Early in his medical career, in the mid-1950s, Leon Eisenberg became fascinated with the childhood mind. Wanting to know more, he broke free from the shackles of the Freudian psychoanalytic dogma that dominated child psychiatry at the time to conduct groundbreaking biologically based research of childhood developmental problems. This research included the first randomised clinical drug trials in child psychiatry.

"I think what Leon brought to the field was a different way of thinking—thinking out of the box," said David DeMaso, chairman of psychiatry at Boston Children's Hospital and professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at Harvard Medical School. "He was thinking in terms of biology, of evidence based

treatment, way before anybody else. His was a bio-psycho-social model at a time when psychoanalytical thinking was the norm."

Eisenberg's direct involvement as a child psychiatry researcher was over by 1967, when he moved to Harvard Medical School as chief of psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital. But in a dozen years he had helped transform the discipline.

Beginning in 1952 at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Eisenberg began a fellowship under Leo Kanner, the Austrian born child psychiatrist, who, in the early 1940s, first described autism. In a study of autistic adolescents published in 1956, Eisenberg recognised patterns of language use as the best predictor of prognosis. At the time, many patients who are now are diagnosed as having autism were thought to have mental retardation.

There followed a barrage of papers on attention deficit disorder, learning delays, and other childhood problems. In a study of children otherwise developing normally, Eisenberg found that early reading difficulties increased the chances of later bad behaviour.

His most revolutionary study came in 1962, when he launched the first randomised clinical drug trial in

child psychiatry. In subsequent drug trials he showed that tranquillising drugs were inferior to placebo in the treatment of anxiety disorders and that stimulant drugs could be effective in controlling hyperactivity. Those studies were the first steps towards ever

increasing use of drugs to treat child and adolescent disorders, a development that in recent years concerned Eisenberg.

Drug companies

DeMaso, who in the late 1970s became one of Eisenberg's many protégés, said that Eisenberg thought that many psychiatrists were being influenced by drug companies, adding, "He thought children are now being overdiagnosed with bipolar illness and then overmedicated."

Leon Eisenberg was born in Philadelphia on 8 August

1922, the oldest child of Russian immigrants. His father steered him from the beginning towards medical school. But despite near straight As in college, he was turned down by several medical schools because of his Jewish background. Finally, with help from a contact of his father's, he was admitted to the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

After graduating in 1946 as valedictorian of his class, he took a rotating intern position at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York city, where he became interested in psychiatry. He served two years as a captain in the US Army Medical Corps and in 1952 moved to Johns Hopkins, becoming chief of child psychiatry in 1961. He held the position until becoming chief of psychiatry in 1967 at Harvard, where his focus shifted to training new generations of researchers.

Although Eisenberg has been widely recognised for his childhood research, the Harvard psychiatrist and anthropologist Arthur Kleinman thinks that his contributions from the 1970s onward are as important. Kleinman, a psychiatry resident in the 1970s under Eisenberg, said that he converted the department from a small group of mostly psychoanalysts to a diverse and vibrant national powerhouse that helped shape modern psychiatry.

"He made that department," Kleinman says. "He set the intellectual tone to be highly academic."

In 1968 he also became a proponent of affirmative action for African Americans and other minorities at Harvard Medical School, guided by his own experiences of discrimination as a Jew in the 1940s.

Social sciences

During the 1970s, Eisenberg advocated a closer relationship between medicine and the social sciences, which he thought would improve medical care by, as Kleinman put it, "bringing biology together with the social world." In 1980 Eisenberg became founding chairman of Harvard's department of social medicine, a position he held until 1991. Eisenberg was the ideal choice to guide the new department, said Kleinman, adding, "He had an omnivorous hunger for knowledge that went across the fields."

Eisenberg was honoured with numerous awards, including the distinguished service award and special presidential commendation from the American Psychiatric Association. He served from 1964 as mental health consultant to the World Health Organization in multiple capacities and was an honorary fellow of the UK Royal College of Psychiatrists.

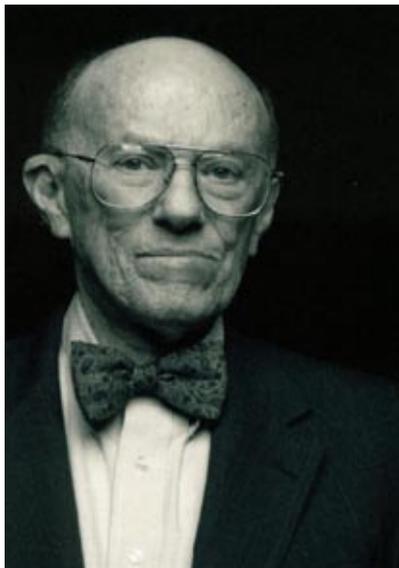
On 1 July this year, the Leon Eisenberg chair in child psychiatry at the Children's Hospital Boston was officially launched, with DeMaso named as the first holder. Decades after his groundbreaking studies, he still yearned to better understand the childhood mind. "I was eating lunch with him about a year ago, and he told me that more child psychiatry research was needed," said DeMaso. "He asked me, 'What are you doing about encouraging your psychiatrists to do more research? They need to do more research. We need more research.'" And DeMaso dutifully followed the advice of his mentor. "We are going to do more research in child psychiatry," he says. "We are planning to focus on training the next generation of child psychiatry researchers."

Eisenberg leaves his wife, Carola, former dean of students at Harvard Medical School and a cofounder of Physicians for Human Rights, two children from a previous marriage, and two stepsons.

Ned Stafford

Leon Eisenberg, psychiatrist (b 1922, q 1946 Pennsylvania), died 15 September 2009 from prostate cancer.

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Richard Stuart Carruthers



Former general practitioner Barrie, Ontario, Canada (b 1942; q Guy's Hospital, London, 1968), died from prostate cancer on 15 February 2009. Born in Farnborough and educated in Norwich and at Uppingham School, Richard Stuart Carruthers moved to Canada in 1971 after graduating and working for three years in London. Most of his 40 years of practising medicine were spent in Canada—namely, in Red Lake, Ontario (1971), Fort Nelson, British Columbia (1971-2), Kitimat, British Columbia (1972-7), Brantford, Ontario (1977-92), and Barrie, Ontario (1993-2008). Although he retired in December 2007, he continued assisting at surgeries until just before his death. Divorced in 1987, he leaves three children.

John Kerr, Phil Gunyon

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Richard James Lance Davis

Former general practitioner Dover (b 1921; q Cambridge/St Thomas' Hospital, London, 1952; DObstRCOG, DA, MRCP), d 6 June 2009. Richard James Lance Davis ("Jim") took a commission in the Royal Marines as soon as the second world war was declared. Sunk on HMS *Repulse* in 1941, he fought in Malaya, becoming a prisoner of war on the Burma-Thailand railway. Jim was in general practice for 32 years, in midlife taking up anaesthetics and becoming clinical assistant for two sessions a week at Buckland Hospital for 12 years. The first GP trainer in Dover, he passed the MRCP at 54 with his first trainee. He achieved his ambition to "get hung" at the Royal Academy in 1995, having taken up oil painting aged 50. He leaves a wife, Eve; five daughters; and 12 grandchildren.

Sally Warnke

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Edgar Gordon Goff

Former general practitioner Brighton Hospital Group, East Sussex (b 1921; q St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, 1950), died on 12 May 2009 after a series of strokes.

Edgar Gordon Goff was a general practitioner in a small practice on the edge of Brighton for 30 years.



A furious wrestler with red tape, he had no time for administrators, social workers, or time wasters. He was hugely caring though, and would rather, as he put it, "walk a mile than measure a coffin." After branching into industrial medicine and sports medicine, he became medical officer for Sussex County Cricket Club and was also responsible for the health of staff at the Royal Sussex County Hospital. He also broadcast as a sports commentator for hospital radio. Predeceased by his wife, Esmée, he leaves one son.

Martin Goff

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Charles Hilton Jones



Former consultant pathologist Clwyd and Deeside Hospitals, North Wales (b 1924; q Liverpool 1948; TD, MD, FRCPath), d 4 September 2009. A 1st MB student, Charles Hilton Jones edited both the university newspaper and the medical school magazine, serving in the Home Guard during the second world war and graduating top in medicine. Four years as registrar and assistant pathologist in Liverpool were followed by five years as lecturer in pathology at Liverpool University. In

1962 he became consultant in North Wales for 27 years, chairing the staff committee and the local BMA division and medical society. His place in the Rotary and doctors' pub quiz teams was assured long into retirement, but few colleagues knew that he contributed crosswords to the *Daily Telegraph*. Predeceased by his wife, Clare, he leaves two children and four grandchildren.

Keith Wright

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Peter Gordon Cochrane Robertson



Former general practitioner Newark, Nottinghamshire (b 1934; q St Andrews 1958), died from metastatic carcinoma of the prostate on 27 July 2009. After house jobs, Peter Gordon Cochrane Robertson studied mammalian cardiovascular physiology on a research scholarship in Melbourne, Australia, before returning to Dundee as a cardiology registrar. In 1969 he moved to Newark, where he worked in partnership until his retirement in 1995. He was clinical assistant in elderly medicine at Hawtonville Hospital and sat on the local medical committee, as well as chairing Cancer Research UK's local appeals committee for 37 years. Representing St Andrews at squash and tennis, Peter became east of Scotland tennis champion and qualified for junior Wimbledon, later leading the British Medical Golfing Society. He leaves a wife, Didi; three daughters; and five grandchildren.

Andrew J Parkin

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2009;339:b4859

Frederick Peter Stephens

Former wing commander Royal Air Force (b 1927; q Charing Cross Hospital, London, 1950; MRCPsych), d 9 June 2009. Frederick Peter Stephens served as medical officer for the Royal

Air Force Medical Branch from graduation until 1968, specialising in neuropsychiatry. After leaving the Royal Air Force, he was forensic psychiatrist for the Home Office, working with adolescents with behavioural disorders. In 1973 he emigrated to Canada, where he was clinical director of the Canadian Correctional Service and assistant professor at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. From 1984 to his retirement in 2003, he was senior staff psychiatrist with the State of New Hampshire and Dartmouth Medical School, as well as medical director of Central New Hampshire Community Mental Health Center. He leaves a wife, Margaret ("Peggy"); six children; and eight grandchildren.

Dermot Stephens

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John Finbarr Walsh



Consultant anaesthetist South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital, Cork (b 1951; q The London 1975; FRCA), died from orofacial cancer on 10 March 2009.

Born in Yorkshire, John Finbarr Walsh undertook postgraduate training in Portsmouth, Wales, Leeds, and Hong Kong. In 1985 he was appointed consultant anaesthetist in Cork, where he worked until shortly before his death. His calm and assured manner was greatly appreciated by surgical colleagues and trainees. With eclectic interests and a strong personality, he was equally at home in the hospital boardroom, on the golf course, or on his road bike at the Col du Galibier. Despite disfiguring surgery after diagnosis in 2007, he retained immense enthusiasm for life, giving a memorable speech at his daughter's wedding three days before he died. He leaves a wife, Anne, and three children.

Andrew J Williams

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