

Jo Eirik Asvall

Refocused the World Health Organization in Europe on public health

Jo Asvall was the World Health Organization regional director for Europe from 1985 to 2000. He championed and shepherded the development of the WHO European Health For All strategies and targets from concept to practical application in local communities and institutions across the now 53 countries in the European region. This approach, supported by a new database that compared health system performance in all WHO European countries on many common health indicators, inspired health systems to look beyond services and to tackle previously neglected social, lifestyle, and environmental determinants of health.

Asvall's leadership led to many landmark public health agreements and initiatives in 43 European countries between 1985 and 2000, and regional commitments on nutrition and physical activity, tobacco control, and reducing harm from alcohol. Through this process Asvall reoriented the way that WHO works in Europe, expanded its technical roles, and developed the regional office as an agency for change, proactively advocating, with partners, for public health oriented policies.

Challenges of transition

Asvall led the regional office through some of the most challenging times in its history. After the break-up of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, he helped to orchestrate the expansion of the region to include 22 new countries. He helped these new member states to tackle the challenges of transition. He established a way for WHO to work with countries, by opening liaison offices in each country, staffed by national public health leaders who could directly help ministries of health to adapt WHO programmes and resources to their particular country. He raised awareness of the international health, development, and donor communities to the changing and urgent health needs of the region, especially the newly independent states and countries of central and eastern Europe, and he brought new resources and attention to tackle growing health inequities and gaps between and within all countries.

In 1986 he led the WHO global response to the Chernobyl disaster, which provided rapid advice on protective actions that countries and individuals could take. In 1991 he was the first director to take WHO into a "hot war." Supported by many European member states, he established offices in

each of the countries involved in the Balkan wars and fielded staff to work with local public health leaders on programmes related to protecting public health infrastructures and services, to tackle mental health and rehabilitation needs. Furthermore, Asvall personally led secret negotiations between ministers of health from the conflicting countries, which helped to establish agreements to protect healthcare facilities.

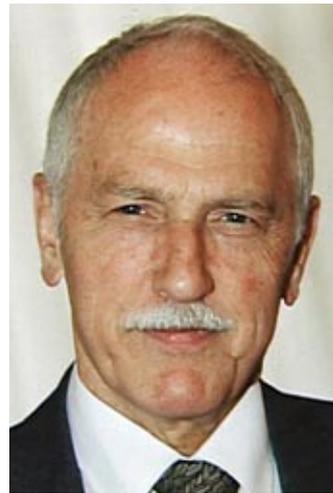
Asvall understood the importance of partnership and the need to engage people in a variety of settings and agencies in promoting health. During his tenure as regional director he established public health networks, with medical, nursing, midwifery, and pharmacy associations; cities; schools; regions; prisons; chronic disease and patient organisations; and health communicators throughout the European region. These were all bound together by the Europe-wide Health For All policy, forming what Asvall called "a great public health army of collaborators" and substantially increased the power of the European public health movement.

Asvall was born on 24 June 1931 in Oslo, Norway. He received his medical training at Oslo University and a masters in public health from Johns Hopkins University in 1969. He began his career with WHO in 1959 after military service in Norway at the Norwegian Air Force Research Center. From 1959 to 1963 he started WHO's first national malaria eradication projects in Africa, working in Togo and Dahomey.

Torture victims

Asvall returned to Norway in 1963 to work as a clinical oncologist at the Radium Hospital in Oslo, where he helped develop Norway's cancer registry, established the hospital's first professional development plan, and introduced systems approaches to management. He moved from there to become director of the Hospitals Department of

the Norwegian Ministry of Social Affairs, where he worked under the leadership of Martin Evang from 1971 to 1976 and coordinated the development of Norway's first National Hospital Development Plan. He returned to WHO in 1976 to serve as



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regional programme manager for national health planning and evaluation. He became director of programme management of the regional office for Europe under Leo Kaprio in 1979 and was elected regional director in 1985. He held this position for 15 years. After retirement from WHO Asvall became director of the Danish Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims and continued to work for WHO as a consultant.

Zsuzsanna Jakab, the current WHO regional director for Europe, notes that Asvall was "a true leader in European health policy and public health. The region owes him a lot. He was an extraordinary person, an inspiring, energetic and relentless public health advocate whose life's work

has significantly improved the capacities of health systems across the region to address our health challenges and serve all our people. We must hold his memory dear and learn from him."

In his last speech to WHO staff just days before his death, Asvall's message was that the European region's "potential for action is almost limitless, both for raising resources and for going into issues that are controversial, but where we can help our member states. Our constitution gives us that mandate, and, in my own view, also a strong responsibility for action. Be courageous and willing to take risks, but be sure you have the constitutional mandate to lean on."

Asvall leaves his wife, Kirsten Staehr Johansen Asvall, and three children.

Franklin Apfel

Jo Eirik Asvall, public health doctor (b 1931; q 1956, Oslo), died from cancer on 10 February 2010.

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Robert James Dallas

Former general practitioner Tirau, New Zealand (b 1931; q St Andrews 1958; DRCOG), d 21 October 2009. Robert James Dallas ("Bob") emigrated to New Zealand in 1964 and became the sole practitioner in the rural township of Tirau, although he received strong support from his wife (a doctor and anaesthetist). He shared a rostership at Putaruru and delivered hundreds of babies at the maternity hospital. Bob was fascinated by sudden infant death syndrome, and his observations from his practice led him to conclude that overheating is the most important causal factor. Simply, Bob would draw the link to dogs that are left in cars and to refugees who die in containers. He leaves a wife, Frances; three sons; and six grandchildren.

Alan Dallas

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Mary Ellis (née Heald)



Former paediatrician at Bolton District General Hospital (b 1930; q Manchester 1956; DCH), died after a long illness 7 January 2010.

Mary Ellis (née Heald) grew up in Read, Lancashire and finished schooling at Oakfield, Kirkby Lonsdale. She worked in general practice with Dr Simmons in Bolton, then with Dr Walter Dickson in paediatrics at Bolton District General Hospital, gaining her DCH and researching aerosol inhalers for childhood asthma. Tragically, her middle son died in 1985. Mary was unstinting in her care of both her parents and her in-laws in their old age. She leaves a husband; two children; and six grandchildren.

Maureen Ellis

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Charles Patrick Gore

Former consultant psychiatrist Yorkshire and Aylesbury (b 1918; q Trinity College Dublin 1940; MD, FRCPI, FRCPsych DPM), d 25 March 2009.

Charles Patrick Gore worked in general practice before training at the Maudsley Hospital. In 1952 a Fulbright scholarship took him to the US, where he also taught at Harvard. He returned to a consultant post at Rainhill Hospital, Liverpool, before being appointed medical superintendent at Menston Hospital, where he introduced many reforms. He then moved to Scalebor Park Hospital, where he was recognised as a compassionate clinician and an intellectually rigorous colleague. Always ready to take on new challenges, his last substantive post was as consultant in psychogeriatrics in Aylesbury. Predeceased by his wife, Elizabeth, he leaves two sons; a daughter; and four grandchildren.

Charles Gore
Tim Jerram

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1525

James Innes



Former consultant physician Edinburgh (b 1915; q Edinburgh 1937; MD, FRCP), d 26 December 2009.

James Innes spent most of his medical career in the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, with a break during the war when he served in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. An outstanding physician and haematologist, he was also a gifted clinical teacher who inspired generations of students. He was at ease with patients from all walks of life and had an uncanny ability to extract new information and note hitherto unnoticed clinical signs, thereby coming to the correct diagnosis. As medical secretary of the Harveian

Society, people came from far and wide for his hilarious delivery of the minutes of the yearly meeting. He leaves a wife, Elma; three children; and eight grandchildren.

J Alastair Innes

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1548

Alastair Hugh Bailey Masson



Former consultant anaesthetist Edinburgh (b 1925; q Edinburgh 1947; FRCA FRCS, BA), d 13 October 2009. Alastair Hugh Bailey Masson's career as an anaesthetist started almost by accident during national service in the Royal Air Force, but he became a leader in the development of anaesthesia into a highly technological and specialised practice. He helped solve the problems of open heart surgery in the 1950-60s, for example, by realising that postoperative lung ventilation would ease the work of the heart and help it recover from surgery. His interest in the history of medicine led to his appointment as honorary archivist to the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, a position that he filled with distinction. He leaves a wife, Marjorie; four children; and eight grandchildren.

Tony Wildsmith
Ewan Masson

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June Paterson-Brown (née Garden)

Former medical officer Scottish Borders (b 1932; q Edinburgh 1955; CVO, CBE), died 6 December 2009 from complications of Parkinson's disease. After she married, June Paterson-Brown (née Garden) moved to the Scottish Borders, where she helped set up and run the family planning and well woman clinics. Her involvement with the Girl Guides led to her



appointment as Commonwealth chief commissioner 1985-90 and then vice president of the Girl Guides Association until 2009. She was a trustee and vice president of the Princes' Trust and a member of the district Duke of Edinburgh Awards committee. She became the first lady lord lieutenant in Scotland when appointed to Roxburgh, Etrick, and Lauderdale 1998-2007. She leaves a husband, Peter; four children; and eight grandchildren.

Simon Paterson-Brown
Sara Paterson-Brown

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c152

Rita Walford (née Gleiberman)



Former community clinical and family planning medical officer London (b 1915; q Birmingham 1938), d 1 December 2009.

In 1942, Rita Walford volunteered for the armed forces and became one of the earliest women medical officers in the Royal Air Force, initially as a flying officer and then as a flight lieutenant. On leaving the RAF she worked as an anaesthetist, but after the birth of her first child she worked part time as a community clinical medical officer and family planning medical officer for various London health authorities. Rita worked well beyond the normal retirement age and was fiercely proud of her status as a registered medical practitioner. Predeceased by her husband, Adolph; she leaves two sons; and five grandchildren.

Diana Walford

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1406