

James Black

Nobel prize winning pharmacologist who invented β blockers

When James Black was a fourth year student at St Andrew's Medical School his father died of a heart attack after a particularly stressful day. The thought stayed with the young Scot that if the heart could be protected in some way from stress then the fatal damage would not occur. In a brilliant career divided between industry and academia he went on to develop two landmark drugs—the β blocker propranolol and cimetidine for ulcer treatment—and was awarded the Nobel prize in 1988 (with Gertrude Elion and George Hitchings).

"To pilot one drug into the clinic is exceptional; to do so twice is a truly remarkable feat," said Richard Bond, professor of pharmacology at Houston University, a friend and colleague of Black's who remembers his openness, particularly with young students. At a conference in California in the 1990s he saw Black being approached by a distinguished scientist who wanted some time with him. "Of course, please have your secretary contact my office and we will schedule it," came the courteous reply. Later an awestruck student mumbled the same request. "Sir James simply put his arm around the student and said, 'Why don't we have lunch?'"

Superstar status

"Sir James's passion for receptor theory was contagious. All those whose lives he touched will be affected for ever," said Professor Bond. Michael Rawlins, chairman of the UK rationing body the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, has said that a Nobel prize confers superstar status (*BMJ* 1988;297:1628). But Black wanted none of it. "He was a private man who feared loss of privacy," said his former colleague Paul Gerskowitch, who was with Black when he learnt of the prize. "He said let's go for a pint and later admitted that the news had made him feel a bit sick," said Gerskowitch.

Essentially "a lab man," Black was at his happiest working in a small team in which everyone contributed, and he was impatient with committees and inflexible organisations, says Gerskowitch. Interviewed in 2001, Black joked that he had thought of writing a book on "institutional pathology" (see <http://nobelprize.org/mediaplayer/index.php?id=414>). Noting the "feudal structures" of one of his employers he remarked, "Entrenched attitudes can absorb reformist attitudes like a punch bag."

"Jim made millions for the pharmaceutical industry but was uninterested in money and not a

wealthy man," said Gerskowitch. "He was vocationally orientated and saved millions of lives."

"He was massively inspirational and inspired huge loyalty," he added. "He loved a good argument, but laughter is what most comes to mind," he said. The "Black laugh" was well known.

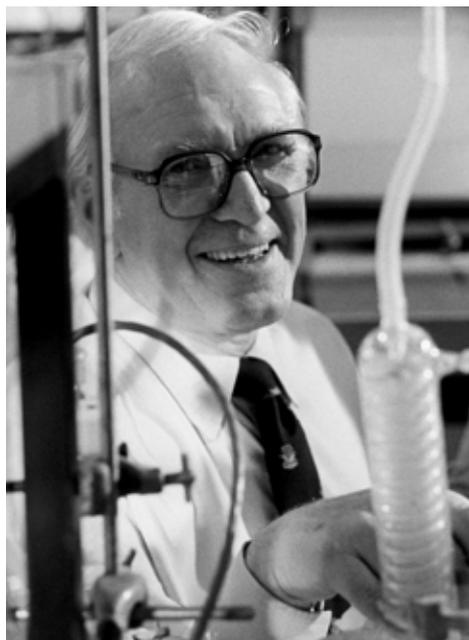
Always insistent that there was no quick fix for drug development, Black was critical of what he saw as the changing nature of universities. "More and more of the big ones are becoming like companies, with a huge obsession about making money," he said.

Born in Uddingston, Lanarkshire, Black, who died aged 85, was the fourth of five sons, all of whom went into the professions. His father was a colliery manager who had started work in the pits at the age of 13. Black won a scholarship to St Andrew's when he was 15. "In the cold forbidding greyness of St Andrew's," he would later write, "I learnt the joys of substituting hard study for the indulgence of day dreaming." Prizes followed.

Qualifying in 1946, he married Hilary Vaughan, a biochemistry student—"the most exciting person I have ever known and the mainspring of my life until her death in 1986"—and rejected a conventional medical career because he disliked the attitudes of senior consultants. Hearing patients referred to as "the hernia in bed 10" offended him. "A staunchly Baptist home meant I was taught to be respectful of others no less than myself, influencing ever since my political and administrative attitudes," he said (see http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/medicine/laureates/1988/black-autobio.html).

Student debts and poor academic job prospects led the Blacks to Malaya, where he lectured in

physiology for three years. "We paid off our debts, made friends, and returned in 1950 with a larger view of life. I had, however, no income, no home of any kind and no prospects." He knocked on doors of physiology departments all over London without success, but a chance encounter led to a lectureship at Glasgow Veterinary College, where over eight years he built up a physiology department and returned to the thoughts stimulated by his father's death. "I wanted to stop the effects of adrenaline on the heart," he said.



Black was critical of what he saw as the changing nature of universities. "More and more of the big ones are becoming like companies, with a huge obsession about making money"

After six years at the chemical company ICI he became head of biological research at Smith Kline & French in 1964 and, in 1973, professor of pharmacology at University College London. In 1977 he moved to Wellcome as head of research and in 1984 became professor of analytic pharmacology at King's College, London. He chancellor, Dundee University, from 1992 to 2006.

He was made a fellow of the Royal Society in 1976. Knighted in 1981, he was awarded the order of merit in 2000. In 1994 he married Rona MacKie, emeritus professor at Glasgow University.

Once introduced on a Radio 3 science programme as "the Henry Moore of pharmacology" he took pleasure in the arts, especially music, and Berlioz in particular. Black was diagnosed as having disseminated prostate cancer in 2002 and was expected to survive two years. "But we managed eight, and they were great years," said MacKie.

Black leaves his wife, a daughter from his first marriage to Hilary Vaughan, who died in 1986, and two stepchildren.

Joanna Lyall

James Whyte Black, pharmacologist (b 1924; q St Andrew's 1946), died from the consequences of disseminated prostate cancer on 22 March 2010.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1817

See **VIEWS AND REVIEWS**, p 872

Alexander Adam



Former consultant orthopaedic surgeon Grampian Health Board, and honorary senior lecturer University of Aberdeen (b 1920; q Aberdeen 1942; FRCS), d 20 December 2009.

Alexander Adam ("Alex") graduated at the age of 21 and spent much of the second world war in India and Burma with the 81st West African Division. After training, he returned to Aberdeen in 1956 as consultant, retiring in 1983. He was interested in children's orthopaedics, particularly club foot, and he performed the first total hip replacement in Aberdeen in 1969. Described on retirement as the best all-round orthopaedic surgeon Aberdeen had seen, Alex then researched the lives and works of Aberdeen's medical graduates and was made an honorary professor in 2008 for this work. Predeceased by his wife, Cheynie, in 1999, he leaves two children and four grandchildren.

Alistair Adam

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1962

Ananda Lal Goswani



Former director general of medical services Indian Railway Board (b 1927; q Lucknow 1949; MD, FRCPed, DTD), died from end stage chronic obstructive pulmonary disease on 21 September 2009.

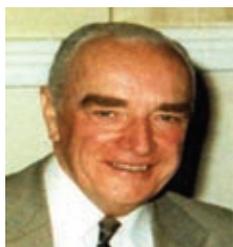
Ananda Lal Goswani developed an interest in tuberculosis early in his career, obtaining further training in the UK. He worked as assistant physician in Bournemouth Chest Clinic. On his return to India he joined the medical service of the recently

nationalised Indian Railways. He rose through the ranks of administration but not in any way giving up an active clinical role in hospitals at his various postings. Under the auspices of the Colombo plan he took a training course in tuberculosis control in Japan in 1980. He leaves a wife, Savitri, and three children.

Krishna Somers

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1958

John Russell Grant Grice



Former general practitioner Rochdale (b 1918; q Glasgow 1942), died on 12 December 2009, having had dementia for some years.

After qualification, John Russell Grant Grice served in the Royal Army Medical Corps, becoming lieutenant colonel, and was one of the first British officers into Belsen. Subsequently, he settled into general practice and community life in Rochdale with enthusiasm and vigour, retiring in 1987. John served on various medical committees for over 20 years and was honorary medical officer to Rochdale Homets Rugby Club. A keen Rotarian, he was awarded honorary membership in 2004. He was also a founder member of Probus and a magistrate for many years. Predeceased by his first wife, Margaret, in 1978, he leaves his second wife, Pam, and two daughters from his first marriage.

Gail Stoppard

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1963

Peter Julius Denison Heaf

Former chest physician University College Hospital, London (b 1922; q UCH, London, 1946; OBE, MD), d 11 June 2009.

After national service in the Royal Army Medical Corps, Peter Julius Denison Heaf studied for his MD in respiratory physiology. He wrote many papers, including several in the

Lancet, but was probably best known for his *BMJ* publication with Richard Doll highlighting the link between asthma deaths and the use of isoprenaline inhalers in the 1960s—a practice-changing study. He retired in 1986 after 28 years as consultant. He then remained affiliated with the British Legion, leading a team of senior doctors working for the war pensions tribunal. He was also senior medical adviser to the parliamentary group looking at Gulf war syndrome. He leaves four children; his wife, Rosemary, died five months after him.

Stephen Spiro

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1941

Jean Eileen Lawrie (née Grant)

Former honorary secretary and president Medical Women's Federation (b 1914; q Royal Free Hospital, London, 1938; CBE), d 14 May 2009.

Jean Eileen Lawrie (née Grant) championed change for medical women, influencing the government to introduce flexible and part-time training and the retainer scheme. In 1967 she convened and chaired the Women's Taxation Action Group (WOTAG) to ensure that the earned income of a wife would be taxed separately from that of her husband. Jean served on many interprofessional national and international committees, including co-chairing the National Women's Committee. She also worked in gynaecology at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital, as a school doctor for 25 years, and with the University of London teaching school in Chelsea for 10. She leaves a husband, Rex; four children; and 11 grandchildren.

Janet Husband

Christina Williams

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1933

Alistair MacGregor Michael

Former colonel Royal Army Medical Corps (b 1930; q Glasgow 1956; GSM, FRCOG, DipTH&H), died from complications of Parkinson's disease on 18 November 2009.

Alistair MacGregor Michael decided to study medicine during national service with the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC). At Glasgow he was



British Universities' middleweight boxing champion for two years and finalist in the Wyfold cup at Henley regatta. After a spell in general practice he joined the RAMC, specialising in obstetrics and gynaecology and serving in the United Kingdom, Germany, Cyprus, Singapore, and Hong Kong. After retirement he served a term as director of the Irish Family Planning Association and undertook consultant locums. For three years he was the Irish veteran indoor rowing champion. Predeceased by Mareta, his wife of over 50 years, he leaves seven children and five grandchildren.

Ben Moore

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1942

Geoffrey Wooler

Former consultant cardiothoracic surgeon Leeds General Infirmary and pioneer of open heart surgery (b 1911; q Cambridge/The London, 1937; MA), d 1 January 2010.

Geoffrey Wooler was uninspired by law at Cambridge and switched to medicine. After qualification he took up the then new specialty of thoracic surgery at the London Hospital. Forced to leave a learning post in Berlin because of his anti-Nazi comments on Kristallnacht, Geoffrey subsequently served at El Alamein and through North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. He came to Leeds as honorary surgeon before the inception of the NHS, retiring in 1974. He treated portal hypertension, helped in developing a heart-lung machine by ameliorating its excessive haemolysis, and co-developed two biological replacement mitral valves. Geoffrey was well loved and a mentor to many in open heart surgery, nationally and internationally.

Geoffrey Bunch

John Shoesmith

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c1929