

Patrick Mollison

A pioneer in transfusion medicine

Patrick Loudon Mollison, professor of haematology (b 1914; q 1938, Cambridge and London), died on 26 November 2011 from a stroke.

Patrick Mollison, who has died aged 97, was known as “the father of transfusion medicine.” His work enabled blood to be stored for longer, and his research on blood grouping and matching made transfusion safer. Renowned as the author of the classic textbook on transfusion, *Blood Transfusion in Clinical Medicine*, he was also one of the first doctors to enter the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp at the end of the second world war.

As a junior doctor at St Thomas’ Hospital, London, on the outbreak of war, Mollison was dispatched to one of the capital’s four blood supply depots, at Sutton. Initially, his only job was to take blood from donors and build stocks for treating civilian casualties. During the Blitz he delivered blood on demand to hospitals, driving a small van with partially masked sidelights through the blackout, then helping transfuse patients.

When the Medical Research Council began a programme at the depot, Mollison and a colleague carried out a systematic study of acidified citrate dextrose solutions (ACDs). They discovered that blood stored in ACD was harmless to the transfusion recipient and that survival of red blood cells after storage was much improved. Their paper published in 1943 led to ACD becoming the usual preservative for blood and solved a major problem faced by transfusion units early in the war—the short shelf life of stored blood (*BMJ* 1943;2:744). The method was not improved until the 1970s.

Mollison joined the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1943 and arrived at Belsen, in northwest Germany, two days after its liberation. He studied starvation among the prisoners of Bergen-Belsen, reporting his findings in the *BMJ* (*BMJ* 1946;1:4). The article, of historical importance, is no less moving for its tone of clinical detachment: “On examination the patient had an appallingly thin face. The eyes were sunken and the cheek-bones jutted out. These extreme changes made all the patients look alike, so that it became difficult to distinguish one from another.”

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GODFREY ARGENT STUDIO

Patrick Mollison was born in 1914, the son of an otolaryngologist at Guy’s Hospital, London. Brought up in a household with eight servants and a chauffeur, he was sent to Rugby School, which he detested. Not judged academically able, he left early and took extra biology classes before being admitted to read natural sciences at Clare College, Cambridge, where his grandfather had been master. He became an accomplished squash player and learned to fly a Tiger Moth, but earned a degree that he said would not have got him accepted into the department he later headed.

Nevertheless, he recalled, “It had always been understood that I would go into medicine. My father was determined on it and I could see nothing against it.” Mollison joined St Thomas’ Hospital, qualifying in 1938, and toyed with specialising in paediatrics until his wartime experience in transfusion. His son Denis said, “He

wasn’t expected to have a stratospheric career, and it was a surprise to him how successful he was. It was a happy coincidence that he found something he was good at in a new field much in demand, and at an exciting time with a lot of pressure to make advances.”

After the war the Medical Research Council gave Mollison a grant to set up a blood transfusion research unit, housed in a tiny room next to the obstetrics ward at Hammersmith Hospital. He studied haemolytic disease among newborn babies, and the first replacement transfusion in the UK on a baby born with Rh factor related blood poisoning took place on a laboratory bench in his unit.

In 1951 he published *Blood Transfusion in Clinical Medicine*, the definitive textbook that is still judged indispensable to every haematologist and transfusion laboratory. Though later editions were coauthored, he did not entirely relinquish control until 1997. Now known simply as “Mollison,” the 12th edition was published a month after his death.

Mollison moved to St Mary’s Hospital, London, to head its new

haematology department in 1960 and took his research unit with him. Marcella Contreras, who worked with him there in the 1970s and cowrote the textbook’s eighth edition, recalled him as generous with his knowledge though “strict and particular” and insistent on attention to detail. “He had an international reputation—and still does. If you mentioned the word ‘transfusion’ it was synonymous with Mollison. Obstetricians had high respect for him too. He created clinical transfusion medicine as a specialty in its own right.”

London University made him professor of haematology in 1962, and he became a fellow of the Royal Society in 1968. He was consulted by the Queen during the birth of all her children. Mollison retired from St Mary’s in 1979, and was appointed commander of the order of the British empire (CBE) the same year. He was active in retirement, still skiing at 86. His wife gave him a Mercedes sports car for his 90th birthday, which he drove “fast and well,” according to his son.

Patrick Mollison married Margaret Peirce, a doctor from Cape Town, in 1940. They divorced in 1965. He married Jennifer Jones, a consultant anaesthetist at St Mary’s, in 1973. He leaves three sons from his first marriage.

Peter Davies

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J Stephen D Allen



Former consultant cardiothoracic anaesthetist Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast (b 1969; q Belfast 1993; MD, FFARCSI), d 12 January 2011.

J Stephen D Allen (“Steve”) specialised in anaesthesia, and his subspecialty interests lay in critical care medicine and cardiothoracic anaesthesia. He was awarded an MD for his research into the inflammatory and renal response to cardiopulmonary bypass in 2004, having been appointed to a consultant post by the Royal Victoria Hospital in 2003. In the 15 months between the diagnosis of his terminal illness and his death, Steve’s unwavering Christian faith was evident to everyone. He leaves a wife, Sarah, and two children.

Peter Elliott, William McBride, Moyna Bill

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Pieter Van Boxel



Consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist, Berkshire (b 1946; q Cape Town, South Africa, 1972; MRCPsych, FRCPSych), d 26 January 2011.

Senior registrar training at Guy’s Hospital brought Pieter Van Boxel to Berkshire in 1980, where he worked for the following 24 years. Pieter had an unmistakable clinical style; relishing the ridiculous, and poised between irreverence and respect, he engaged children and parents into a therapeutic complicity that often surprised them back to health. His allegiance to GPs and paediatricians combined with an instinctively systemic approach and an ability to obtain the enduring loyalty of

clinicians and secretaries, alike. Pieter retired in time to avoid the worst of current upheavals in healthcare. He leaves his wife, Mo; three daughters; and two grandsons.

Andrew West

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Russell Cherry



Former general practitioner, Birmingham (b 1956; q Birmingham 1980), died from a brain tumour on 18 September 2011.

After house jobs and vocational training, Russell Cherry worked in general practice in Hall Green, Birmingham, before joining Jiggins Lane Medical Centre, the practice that he helped propel to the forefront in technology and quality. He was prescribing adviser in South Birmingham and was active in commissioning groups where he was sought after for his wise counsel. A GP trainer for many years and an outstanding undergraduate GP tutor at Birmingham University, he became an excellent clinical subdean, working with fifth year tutors. He leaves his second wife, Sandy, and two sons.

Sylvia Chudley, Jim Parle

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Jonathan Adekunle Magbadelo

Former accident and emergency doctor and surgeon (b Nigeria 1935; q Trinity College Dublin 1973), d 10 October 2011.

Jonathan Adekunle Magbadelo worked as a doctor in the Grantham and Newark area in accident and emergency medicine and surgery before his enforced retirement because of ill health. He was raised by his grandmother and after a varied career, qualified in medicine after a biochemistry degree. He went back to Nigeria as an army doctor in the rank of major. His refusal to cooperate with the corruption then rife led to his lack of success in preference. So he moved back to the UK and worked

around the country until settling in Grantham. In his final years, he enjoyed brief happiness with another doctor whom he married in 1988; Camilla sadly died in 1995. Jonathan had glaucoma and was registered blind, although he still travelled back to Nigeria. His passion for Manchester United football club remained to the end. His last few years were tinged with sadness and a slow decline in health. He died peacefully and is now interred next to his wife. He is survived by his eight children and his first wife.

Stephen Vogt

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Leslie Naftalin



Former general practitioner (b 1912; q Glasgow 1938), d 10 November 2011.

After qualifying as a dentist in 1937, Leslie Naftalin was briefly in practice in Birmingham before the war. After serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps, he returned to Glasgow to set up practice in the deprived areas of Townhead, and later in Provanmill and Balornock. He also worked part time for many years for the Ministry of Pensions. His early recollections of general practice were of diphtheria, tuberculosis, polio, and overwhelming infection. He was a huge advocate for the NHS, which brought equality of access to health for his patients. He retired aged 75 after 41 years of practice in Glasgow, but he continued his involvement in community and charitable work till his death. He leaves a wife, Beulah; four children; and 12 grandchildren.

Nicholas J Naftalin, Alan A Naftalin

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John Michael Talbot

Former consultant bacteriologist and pioneer of the hospice movement (b 1923; q London 1943; MD), died after a long illness on 3 December 2011.



John Michael Talbot served two years as a doctor in the Royal Air Force in Singapore before returning to London at the end of the war to gain an MD in bacteriology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. He subsequently took up a position as a consultant bacteriologist at Kingston General Hospital. In 1954, he married Rosalyn Carrick, and the couple moved to Croydon, where they raised three children. He volunteered at St Christopher’s Hospice, where Dame Cecily Saunders was medical director. In 1980 he became medical director at Priscilla Bacon Lodge, a palliative care centre in Norwich, from which he retired in 1988. He is survived by Rosalyn, three children, and seven grandchildren.

Heidi Blake

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Elizabeth Mary Helen Veitch

General practitioner, Arbroath (b 1955; q Royal Free Hospital, London, 1979), d 3 July 2011.

Elizabeth Mary Helen Veitch (“Mary”) had recently established herself as a partner in Springfield Medical Practice in Arbroath, but during that short time immersed herself in the practice and community. Mary was born and brought up in Leicestershire, and her talent for music was apparent at a young age. She could easily have pursued a professional career in music, but her vocation led her to medicine. She worked as a GP in several parts of the country and in 2007 moved to Tayside, working in the out of hours service and mentoring nurse practitioners and doctors in training. She soon found a partnership in Arbroath. Mary died after a brief illness. She will be missed by her friends, colleagues, and patients, but most of all by her children.

Alex Watson, Anne Ramsay

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