

Vincent “Ċensu” Tabone

President of Malta who pioneered anti-trachoma campaigns

Vincent Tabone, ophthalmologist (b 1913; q 1937, University of Malta), died on 14 March 2012 from atherosclerotic vascular disease and heart failure.

From earliest childhood Vincent Tabone was very much aware of trachoma, the leading cause of infectious blindness in the world. The disease affected at least one member of 30% of all families on the tiny Maltese island of Gozo, where Tabone was born. So, not surprisingly, Tabone had wanted to train in ophthalmology after earning his medical degree in 1937 from the University of Malta.

Unfortunately for Tabone, ophthalmology training was not available in Malta at the time and soon thereafter, in 1939, the second world war broke out. Tabone served as medical officer in the Royal Malta Artillery, working in various hospitals on Malta. Towards the end of the war as the military action moved far beyond Malta, Tabone finally got his wish. A British ophthalmologist based on Malta began training Tabone. When discharged in 1946, Tabone was awarded a scholarship for intensive ophthalmology training in the United Kingdom. After a year in the UK,

he returned to Malta as an ophthalmologist armed with the latest knowledge and expertise. He began an important systematic battle against trachoma on his home island.

“The eradication of trachoma was and still is, to some extent, a huge story,” said Robert Feibel, a clinical ophthalmology professor at Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis, who recently wrote an article for the *Archives of Ophthalmology* detailing Tabone’s contributions (2012;130:373-7). “Tabone was only one player in this story,” Feibel added, “but he was important in demonstrating that widespread eradication was possible.”

Tabone was born the youngest of 10 children on 30 March 1913 on Gozo, which now has a population of 31 000. His father, a doctor and surgeon, died when the boy was 9 years old. At 11, Ċensu, as he was known, left his family for a Jesuit boarding school on the main island of Malta.

“As a young child he wanted to be the pope,” says Tabone’s grandson John-Paul Tabone, a general practitioner and vice president of the Medical Association of Malta. But aged 17 he chose medicine, as his two older brothers had done, enrolling at the University of Malta. In addition to his medical degree, he also earned a degree in pharmacy.

After the second world war, his first stop in the UK was as house officer at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London. He next trained at the Royal College of Physicians of London and the Royal College of Surgeons of England, earning in 1947 a diploma

in ophthalmic medicine and surgery. He then spent two months at the University of Oxford training under Ida Mann, who in the 1950s investigated trachoma among indigenous people of Australia and the Pacific islands.

Back in Malta, in 1948 Tabone headed a new government programme to evaluate and treat trachoma on Gozo using sulphonamides. Still eager to learn, Tabone took a correspondence course from Edinburgh University for a specialised ophthalmology degree. In 1949, he spent two months at the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh, passing written examinations to obtain

a fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, specialising in ophthalmology.

On Gozo, of the 4058 schoolchildren examined by Tabone’s team, 721—almost 18%—were diagnosed as having trachoma. Depending on the patient, Tabone used various combinations of oral sulphonamides, sulpha drops, and sulpha ointment, enlisting support from schools to ensure children completed treatments. After two years, the prevalence had plunged to only six cases, or 0.15%.

Professor Feibel says that sulphonamides were first used for trachoma treatment in 1938 by Fred Loe, who was working on an American Indian reservation in the United States. He achieved a 90% cure rate compared with previous rates of only 20%. However, advancing the new treatment came to a halt during the second world war when sulphonamides were reserved primarily for military use.

Tabone presented his impressive results at the International Congress of Ophthalmology in London in 1950, but was met with scepticism. Some attendees insisted trachoma was not curable and that Tabone had only been treating secondary infections. Nonetheless, Tabone persevered and in 1951 published an important paper in the *BMJ* detailing his Gozo work that caught the attention of the medical world (*BMJ* 1951;1:738-40).

In subsequent years, Tabone was a leader in fighting trachoma around the world, serving on the panel of trachoma experts for the World Health Organization, as well as coordinating or advising anti-trachoma programmes in countries including Taiwan, Indonesia, Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia, and Sudan. “He was a pioneer in showing how effective this treatment was when applied in a uniform and comprehensive manner and in developing national schemes to implement its use,” Professor Feibel says.

Tabone’s political life began in 1954 when he helped found the Medical Officers Union after the government failed to consult doctors on changes to the healthcare system. The union later became the Malta Medical Association, with Tabone as its first president. In 1961, Tabone became a member of the Nationalist Party’s executive committee and in 1966 was elected to parliament, holding the seat through the 1980s, as well as key party and ministerial posts.

Despite these political demands, Tabone continued to practise medicine. Using the Maltese word for grandfather, his grandson, John-Paul Tabone, says: “*Nannu* always considered himself a doctor first and foremost. He used to say, ‘I am a doctor who did other things.’” He adds: “The balance was difficult, and the days long. The family used to wait for him to come home before they ate dinner and they all ate together whatever time it was.”

In 1968 at the United Nations in New York, Tabone proposed that ageing populations deserved greater attention, leading in 1982 to the Vienna action plan on ageing, and in 1988 the establishment on Malta of the United Nations International Institute on Ageing. In 1988 at the UN, Tabone, as Malta’s foreign affairs minister, proposed that climate should be considered as a common heritage of mankind, leading to a UN resolution.

In 1989 he resigned as foreign minister and from parliament to be elected president of Malta, serving a five year term. He leaves his wife of more than 70 years, Maria, and eight children.

Ned Stafford

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Tabone, as Malta’s foreign affairs minister, proposed that climate should be considered as a common heritage of mankind, leading to a UN resolution

Wilfred Ernest Chapman



Former general practitioner, Durham City (b 1915; q Newcastle upon Tyne 1939), d 21 January 2012.

Having worked in orthopaedics, Wilfred Chapman ("Wilf") joined the Royal Air Force in 1942 and became medical officer to an Australian fighter squadron before serving in Normandy and Germany. In 1946 he joined the Claypath Medical Practice in his home city, where he stayed for the rest of his working life. In addition to general practice he gave anaesthetics for the local orthopaedic department, sat on the Council of Durham University, was a trustee of the Freemen of Durham City, and enjoyed fishing in his spare time. He was a founder member of the Royal College of General Practitioners but was never involved in local medical politics. He retired in 1986. His wife, Louie, died in 2006, and he is survived by his two daughters and four grandchildren.

Robert Catty

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Robert Andrew Fay

Former general practitioner, Pewsey and Wells (b 1938, q St Thomas's 1968), d 6 November 2011).

Robert Andrew Fay ("Bob") entered medicine as a mature student, having worked as an accountant in Canada for several years. After senior house officer jobs in Winchester he joined a vocational training scheme in Wiltshire, eventually settling as a partner in Pewsey, where he spent 17 years. During this time he also trained in osteopathy, establishing his own private practice alongside his GP work. In 1991 the family moved to Somerset, where Bob worked initially as a locum and then as a partner in Wells. His career was cut short when he was diagnosed with Pick's disease. Shortly after moving to Oxfordshire to be closer to his children, he was diagnosed with metastatic prostate

cancer. He leaves his wife, Ginty, and their four children.

Henry Fay

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Manjusha Ravindra Gokhale



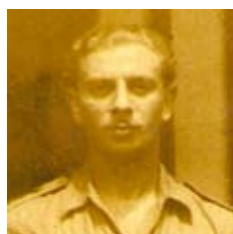
General practitioner, Liverpool (b 1963; q University of Jaipur 1986; MD, MRCP, MRCP, Diploma in Diabetes and Endocrinology), d 12 October 2011.

Manjusha Ravindra Gokhale ("Manju") did her undergraduate and postgraduate training in obstetrics and gynaecology, and then paediatrics, at the University of Jaipur. She joined the National AIDS Research Institute (NARI) in Pune as a senior clinical research fellow in 1991. She moved to the UK with her husband in 1995 and trained in paediatrics in the north west but then decided to become a salaried general practitioner in central Liverpool. Supported by the commissioners to train in diabetes and endocrinology, she was one of the first wave of new GPs with a special interest. She received a diagnosis of breast cancer in 2007 and continued to work part time until 2010. She is survived by her husband, Ravindra, and two sons, Rohan and Sameer.

Ravindra Gokhale

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Jack Gould



Former general practitioner and police surgeon, Liverpool (b 1919; q Liverpool 1943), died from heart failure and renal failure on 28 January 2012.

Jack ("Jackie") Gould wanted to be a professional soldier but qualified in

medicine. In 1944 he enlisted and attained the rank of major in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He served in Java, Sumatra, Burma, Singapore, and India. On returning to Liverpool in 1947 he became a general practitioner, a divisional police surgeon, and a member of the Association of Police Surgeons of Britain. In 1961 he set up a full time medicolegal practice and joined the Medico-Legal Society. He was one of the first to introduce the concept of whiplash injury. Up to his retirement in 2002 his reports numbered in the thousands, with the occasional court appearance. He is survived by his wife, June; four children; and nine grandchildren.

Derek Gould

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Murray Archibald Jackson



Former consultant psychiatrist at the Maudsley and King's College Hospitals (b 1922; q Sydney University 1945; FRCP, FRCPsych, DPM), died from heart failure on 4 July 2011.

Murray Archibald Jackson came to the UK in 1947. He trained as a psychoanalyst and became a fellow of the British Psychoanalytical Society. For many years he directed an acute admission ward at the Maudsley Hospital. His particular interest was the application of psychoanalytical concepts to the treatment and understanding of psychotic illness. Generations of nurses, psychiatrists, and social workers benefited from watching through a one way screen as Murray interviewed patients, often managing to make sense of very disturbed behaviour. After retiring from the NHS in 1987, Murray spent many years teaching and leading seminars in all the Scandinavian countries. He leaves Cynthia, his wife of 54 years; three daughters; and four grandchildren.

Judy Jackson

Cite this as: BMJ 2012;344:e2054

Alan Ernest Gerald Pearson



Former associate specialist in psychiatry Harrison Hospital, Dorchester (b 1926; q Cambridge 1977; PhD), died from prostate cancer on 28 November 2011.

Alan Ernest Gerald Pearson entered medicine in later life: after a degree in natural sciences from Cambridge after the war, he completed a PhD at Mount Vernon, investigating the effect of radiotherapy on mouse tumours, an important contribution at the time into uncertainty over radioresistance of cancer cells. In 1971 after several years at Smith, Kline and French in the research department, he returned to Cambridge to study medicine, with clinical years at St Bartholomew's Hospital. After registration he moved to Dorset and, after a short time in general practice, took up psychiatry. His love of medicine continued well after official retirement in locum work. He leaves his wife, Anne; three children; and seven grandchildren.

David Pearson

Cite this as: BMJ 2012;344:e1445

Naveen Premaratne

Foundation year doctor Ipswich Hospital (b 1982; q 2009, Barts and the London Hospitals), d 5 November 2011.

Naveen Premaratne ("Nav") graduated in biomedical sciences from St George's, London, in 2004, and despite a chronic illness achieved his childhood dream of graduating in medicine some five years later. He completed his foundation year at Ipswich Hospital. He was keen to make his mark in medicine, but his potential was never realised. His career was cut short when he died after surgery. He is survived by his parents, Udeni and Vije Premaratne, and his younger brother, Vidath.

Dilanki Ranmuthu

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