

# Guinter Kahn

Key figure in the development of hair loss remedy minoxidil

**Guinter Kahn (b 1934; q University of Nebraska Medical Center 1958), had been in ill health for several years and died on 17 September 2014.**

During the 1970s, doctors prescribing minoxidil as a treatment for hypertension were noticing an unusual side effect. Patients taking the drug orally often sprouted hairs on their bodies. Indeed, a 1977 paper in *The BMJ* noted that although minoxidil was a potentially effective treatment for patients with high blood pressure and renal disease, it had the unwanted side effect of “excessive hair growth, which makes its use in women difficult.”<sup>1</sup>

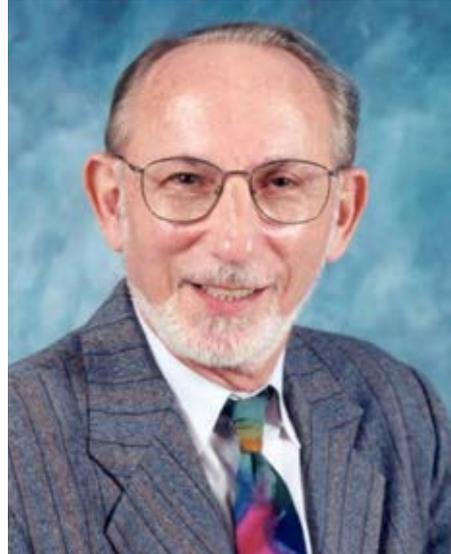
Seven years before that paper in *The BMJ*, the hairy side effect of minoxidil had been brought to the attention of dermatologist Guinter Kahn. Already losing a few hairs on the top of his head, he immediately grasped the potential significance for bald men.

At the time, Kahn was acting head of the dermatology department at the University of Colorado in Denver, USA. A colleague of Kahn’s, Charles A Chidsey, had been hired by the developer of minoxidil, the pharmaceutical firm Upjohn, to test the drug as a hypertension treatment. Chidsey noticed unusual hair growth on his patients and sought dermatological advice from Kahn.

Kahn and a young resident he was mentoring, Paul Grant, examined the patients, including a young woman with hair covering her whole body. Years later, in a *Miami Herald* newspaper interview, Grant recalled Kahn’s initial reaction: “Right off the bat, he said, ‘Boy, this would be great stuff if we could apply it to the top of heads.’”

To start their own hair growing experiments Kahn and Grant obtained minoxidil powder from an assistant of Chidsey’s. They then recruited a secretary and another resident, and the four began applying solutions with various levels of minoxidil each day to a patch of their upper arms. They eventually settled on a solution of ethyl alcohol, propylene glycol, and 1% minoxidil. It turned out that Kahn was allergic to minoxidil. It irritated his skin, and he became sceptical that topical applications would produce hair. But after a few months, Grant observed new dark hairs growing on his arm.

Kahn notified Upjohn, later acquired by Pfizer, about the success. In December 1971 he and Grant flew to company headquarters to report on their experiments. The executives liked what



they heard and later that month filed a patent for a potential baldness remedy—without including Kahn and Grant as co-inventors. Upjohn also reported Kahn and Grant to the Food and Drug Administration for conducting unauthorised experiments on humans.

Kahn and Grant continued their experiments and hired a lawyer. They eventually filed their own patent. After years of legal wrangling, a patent was issued in 1986, listing Kahn and Chidsey as inventors.<sup>2</sup> Grant was not listed as inventor but, like Kahn, did receive royalties, and both men became wealthy. In the US the baldness remedy was initially sold as a prescription drug, under the trade name Rogaine. It was later sold over the counter. In the UK and the rest of Europe, the treatment is sold over the counter, under the name Regaine.

Kahn was born into a Jewish family on 11 May 1934 in Trier, Germany. Just 15 months earlier Adolf Hitler had been installed as Chancellor of the Reich. As the persecution of Jews continued to worsen, Kahn’s family fled for the safety of the United States, and in 1938 they settled in Omaha, Nebraska. To help with family finances, Kahn did odd jobs, including shining shoes and delivering the *Omaha World-Herald* newspaper to more than 200 customers each day.

While his parents had not gone beyond the eighth grade in school, Kahn was a top student, who spent his spare time in the Omaha public library. He completed high school in just three years and needed only three years to earn a

bachelors degree in biology at the University of Nebraska.

He studied medicine at the University of Nebraska Medical Center—continuing to deliver newspapers each day to finance his education. In 1958, at 24 years of age, he earned his medical degree. In a *World-Herald* newspaper article about his impending retirement as a “newspaper boy” to become a doctor, Kahn quipped: “I’m not the smartest paper boy in town. I’m just the most educated.”

After training for a year at Philadelphia General Hospital in Pennsylvania, Kahn wanted to work in Germany. He took a job as ship’s physician on an oil tanker for passage to Europe. In Germany he worked for a few months in the emergency room of a local hospital before enlisting in the US Army Medical Corps and being assigned to an army base hospital.

In 1965, having returned to the US, he began a dermatology residency at the University of Miami and three years later moved to the University of Colorado. He returned to Miami in 1974, practising at Parkway Regional Medical Center. His interests included treatment of skin cancer, and children’s skin diseases and infections. He was the author of more than 100 articles on diseases of the skin.

Kahn continued to practise medicine as his wealth accumulated through minoxidil royalties. He contributed time and money to various humanitarian and charitable causes, including the Miami Jewish Health Systems, the rebuilding of the dermatology department of Rambam Medical Center in Haifa, Israel, as well as two library additions at the University of Nebraska.

In the 1990s he started to conduct intensive private research into the role of doctors in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. He combined his newly acquired expert knowledge on those topics with his interest in medical ethics to give dozens of lectures to students and civic groups in the US and at medical schools in Germany.

Kahn, who had a stroke in 2006 and had lived in a nursing care home since, was once asked what he would change in the world if he had one wish. He replied: “The hate that transcends from one group to another.”

Kahn, who was divorced, leaves a son; a daughter; and his longtime companion, Judy Felsenstein.

**Ned Stafford, Hamburg**

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References are in the version on thebmj.com.

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**Huw Bevan Jones**



**Retired consultant in rehabilitation psychiatry West Wales General Hospital and St David's Hospital, Carmarthen (b 1934; q Westminster Medical School, University of London, 1957; MRCS, DTM&H, DPM Eng, DPM Ed, FRCP Ed, FRCPsych), died with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia and Parkinson's disease on 2 February 2014.**

Huw Bevan Jones was a leading figure in the Welsh psychiatric community and beyond, having worked both in the UK and abroad. In 1975 he moved to West Wales General Hospital and St David's Hospital in Carmarthen, where he worked until he retired. He established a department for autogenic training and managed the rehabilitation service. He held various posts within the Dyfed health authority, was a member of the mental health tribunal for Wales, and secretary/chairman of the Welsh Psychiatric Society. Huw leaves his wife, Wenna; three children; four granddaughters; and his brother.

**Anna Bevan-Jones**

*Cite this as: [BMJ 2015;350:h2](#)*

**Cynthia Lucas**



**Emeritus consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital (b 1935; q Royal Free Hospital, London, 1959, FICS, MRCS, FRCOG), died from bronchopneumonia and advanced Parkinson's disease on 14 December 2013.**

Cynthia Lucas and her husband, Abu Hassim (also an obstetrician and gynaecologist), moved to Zambia in August 1965, where they worked at Lusaka Teaching Hospital as well as writing many articles and developing a training unit. Cynthia campaigned for the government to take up an initiative for birth control clinics and for more trained personnel to carry out tests for cervical cancer. On returning to London, she worked as a consultant at three hospitals before specialising in colposcopic laser treatment of the cervix in 1981 and setting up her own clinics at Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital, where she worked from 1981 to 1994 and became a charity trustee. Cynthia leaves four children and six grandchildren.

**Siobhan Hassim, Oona Hassim, John Osborne**

*Cite this as: [BMJ 2014;349:g7780](#)*

**Peter Stewart Macfarlane**



**Former consultant pathologist University of Glasgow (b 1922; q 1944; FRCP Ed, FRCPath, FRCPath Glas), d 7 October 2014.**

Peter Stewart Macfarlane moved to Glasgow's Western Infirmary in 1974 where he continued to provide a smooth environment in the pathology department until he retired in 1984. In 1981 he inspired and coauthored, *Pathology Illustrated*, a textbook that is now in its seventh edition, having been translated into Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Greek. He retired early to set up a general pathology laboratory in Oman and moved on to organise pathological services in Saudi Arabia. In later years he taught postgraduates in Kuala Lumpur, Bermuda, and the USA (UCLA). He was blessed with two happy marriages, the first to Jean, who bore him a son, Stewart. He leaves his second wife, Joy.

**William Lee, S P Macfarlane**

*Cite this as: [BMJ 2015;350:h5](#)*

**Henry Shapiro**



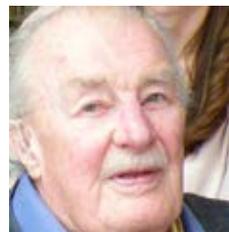
**General practitioner (b 1922; q Leeds 1946), d 17 November 2014.**

Henry Shapiro's mother used to chide him: "If you don't work hard, you'll end up working for Burton's [tailoring company]." He served as obstetrician and gynaecologist in the Royal Army Medical Corps in Egypt, then in Bournemouth before returning to Leeds. He set up in general practice on Harehills Lane, was a skilled and talented clinician, and could often make a correct diagnosis by the turn of the door handle or from a gait or demeanour before asking "Now then, what's the matter, Love?" He did end up working for Burton's as the company's top medical adviser, one of the first involved with industry. He provided wisdom, insight, and wise council, and took a holistic and compassionate approach to healing. He leaves three children and 13 grandchildren, three of whom are in medicine.

**A M James Shapiro**

*Cite this as: [BMJ 2014;349:g7478](#)*

**Kenneth Archibald Edmund Spence**



**Former general practitioner (b 1919; q Guy's Hospital 1951; MRCS), died 16 October 2013.**

Kenneth Archibald Edmund Spence joined the army in 1939 and served in north Africa, Italy, and Palestine. He resumed his medical studies in 1946. After completing his house jobs, he worked in general practice and developed the notion

of singlehanded practice within a group. He also developed an interest in occupational health and was appointed as medical officer at the ABC Bakery and deputy chief medical officer for the Post Office. He served as secretary of the local branch of the BMA and local medical committee. In 1952 he joined the Territorial Army. After retiring from full time practice in 1977 he moved to Sussex, initially pursuing his enthusiasm for sailing but later devoting much of his time to the care of his wife, Dorice, who died in 1994. He leaves a daughter and two grandchildren.

**Joanna Peterson,**

**Max Peterson**

*Cite this as: [BMJ 2014;349:g6861](#)*

**John Berwyn Thomas**



**Former consultant anaesthetist (b 1931; q 1955; DA Eng, FFA RCS Eng), d 18 November 2014.**

John Berwyn Thomas did not take long to decide on a career in anaesthesia. He trained at the Westminster and Brompton Hospitals and spent a year as staff member in anaesthesiology at Stanford University Medical Center, California, USA. In 1970 he was appointed consultant anaesthetist to the Kent and Sussex Hospitals in Tunbridge Wells, where he stayed until he retired in 1995. He was ideally suited to the specialty, where, particularly in times of crisis, his calm and reassuring presence was most welcome. As a colleague he was loyal, dependable, and highly regarded. He was devoted to his wife, Sally, and to their four sons, and he derived great pleasure from his garden. Latterly he had a non-Hodgkin's form of lymphoma, an illness he bore with fortitude.

**Joseph Edward Briffa**

*Cite this as: [BMJ 2015;350:h8](#)*