

# Aidan Halligan

Inspirational medical leader who took on the plight of homeless people

**Aidan WF Halligan (b 1957; q 1984; MA, MD, FROG, FFPHM, MRCPI, FRCC), d 27 April, 2015.**

It is said that Aidan Halligan used his gift as a communicator to become England's deputy chief medical officer and the youngest doctor to secure the post. Forewarned that his interviewing panel was overrunning badly, he charitably set aside his presentation and improvised a tale that clearly won over his inquisitors. Johnny Wardle, a friend of Halligan who would establish the NHS Staff College with him and knew his narrative powers well, says, "Aidan had a story for every occasion, always with a message." Except this one wasn't true, say insiders, and shows how stories about Halligan, a highly charismatic, maverick figure, and stellar communicator, could sometimes take on a life of their own.

Aidan Halligan was made England's first chief of safety at a hospital trust by Duncan Selbie, now head of Public Health England, who both expected and wanted him to speak his mind. "Aidan had three rules for joining me—'don't tell me who to speak to, don't tell me where to go, and don't stop me doing anything'. We had five extraordinary years."

Ian Kennedy, another friend and former chairman of the Healthcare Commission, says Halligan "spoke truth to power."

Born in Dublin, Halligan qualified in medicine at the city's Trinity College in 1984—his wife, Carol, also qualified there. He completed postgraduate training in obstetrics and gynaecology at the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin and the Leicester Royal Infirmary. He was professor of fetal and maternal medicine, and honorary consultant at University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust from 1997 to 2003. Between 1999 and 2006 he held high profile national roles, notably as head of the NHS clinical governance support team, deputy CMO to Liam Donaldson (2003-05), and director of clinical governance for the NHS.

He helped clinical governance issues to become mainstream in trusts, confronted racism, bullying, and harassment and thought deeply about leadership, what motivated staff, and how people and organisations could learn from mistakes.

Donaldson, a close friend and his former boss, says that Halligan was "not always running around in a charismatic way" and could very often "play it straight."

Kennedy says Halligan was skilled in challenging senior doctors and managers whenever he came across poor teamwork, poor communication, or poor outcomes. "He would say, 'I'm holding up the mirror, if you don't like it, it's for you to do something about,' he was remorseless in that... Equally, he was very good at praising where praise was due...."

In the mid-2000s and with the NHS in financial crisis, Halligan publicly challenged target setting for having distorted healthcare priorities. He argued for leadership built on better clinical understanding rather than simply "throwing money at the problem."

Halligan left the civil service—friends say he found the deputy CMO role constraining and frustrating. He came close to joining the Irish health service as chief executive but turned it down amid controversy when the matter became public. Muir Gray, a public health consultant who worked with him on several projects, believes he would have been wasted as a chief executive, and that he was "better in roles that he created himself." "He was a natural leader, not a natural bureaucrat," says Gray.

In 2006 Halligan joined the private sector to run a training firm, Elision Health, backed by venture capitalists, but he would rejoin the NHS shortly afterwards.

Donaldson says that while he was "very successful" and a "fantastic" director of clinical governance, "he did have periods when things didn't work out for him."

In 2007 Halligan became director of education at University College London Hospitals (UCLH), where he commissioned a learning hospital education centre with simulation theatres and viewing rooms. He was moved to act on homelessness and health after a homeless patient died outside UCLH after being thrown out for "causing trouble." He created a pathway team in the hospital, recruiting a specialist GP and the best nurse he knew. The programme was effective and became the national charity Pathway, which now has 10 teams in 10 hospitals around the country.



Halligan appointed Alex Bax, who had been health adviser to former London mayor Ken Livingstone, as the charity's chief executive. Of Halligan, Bax says, "He had incredible drive and he was always three or four steps ahead in his thinking. We see our existence as one of Aidan's legacies. It fills quite a substantial space where there was no focus at all before."

In 2010 Halligan established the NHS Staff College, a senior leadership development programme delivered

in conjunction with the military. He produced a blueprint for the college after returning from a visit to the Camp Bastion field hospital in Afghanistan.

Bax, who manages the college part time, says, "The army looks for leaders whom people will trust and follow and who are absolutely committed. You could say in a way that's what Aidan was trying to be."

Halligan wrote that, at its core, leadership was a purely moral and emotional activity, defined by values and integrity, and requiring the ability to engage and inspire. Doing the right thing on a difficult day was his "mantra," says Wardle, and he "delivered on this every day."

From 2008 to 2013 Halligan combined his role at UCLH with his chief of safety post at Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals, the first position of its kind in the NHS. He appointed the first independent patient safety ombudsman, Delilah Hesling—with a "whistleblowing remit" across the hospital.

In his most recent role, Halligan was director of Well North, a partnership between Public Health England—where he was leadership adviser—the University of Manchester, and nine local authorities across the north of England.

Selbie, its chairman, said it summed up "everything Aidan worked for and believed in—reducing health inequalities and worklessness, a leading cause of poor health, and bringing both hope and opportunity to underserved people and communities."

Wardle says, "It was not what he said, or even what he did. The true essence and enduring spirit of Professor Aidan Halligan was how he made you feel." He leaves a wife, Carol, and three daughters.

Matthew Limb, Croydon limb@btinternet.com

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**Nur Fiona Önen Albring**



**Infectious diseases specialist (b 1975; q Glasgow 1999; MRCP), died from complications of neurocutaneous melanosis on 11 November 2014.**

After attaining her MRCP in 2002 Nur Fiona Önen met the two loves of her life: her future husband, Jörn Albring, and the specialty of infectious diseases. In 2006 Nur and Jörn moved to St Louis, Missouri, to start fellowships at Washington University School of Medicine. Nur became assistant professor in clinical infectious diseases and clinical HIV research in 2010, with more than 30 publications to her name. In January 2013 the couple moved to Germany with their two children. Within one year, Nur mastered German and obtained her medical licence. Sadly, before her first interview she became unwell in March 2014. Nur spent her short time left with her family and leaves her mother, father, twin sister, husband, and children, as well as friends and colleagues.

**Alev Önen**

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**James Tulloch Brown**



**Former consultant orthopaedic surgeon (b 1915; q Glasgow 1938; FRCS Ed), d 15 December 2014.**

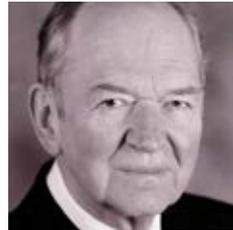
James Tulloch Brown ("JTB") joined the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1939 and served in forward medical units with the 7th Armoured Division throughout the north African and Italian campaigns. After demobilisation he obtained his fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh and was appointed consultant

orthopaedic surgeon to the Western Infirmary, Glasgow. He joined a team of outstanding surgeons under the leadership of Roland Barnes to establish the specialty in that hospital. His major interest was trauma and the management of hip fractures for which he developed new fixation devices, including the JTB sliding nail. After retiring in 1980 he pursued his hobbies of sailing, fishing, photography, and wood turning.

**David L Hamblen, James Graham**

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**Denis Dunbar Gibbs**



**Former consultant physician in general medicine and gastroenterology London Hospital (b 1927; q Oxford 1950; DM, FRCP, DCH, DHMSA), died from a cerebrovascular accident on 8 January 2015.**

In 1974 Denis Dunbar Gibbs was appointed consultant physician to the London Hospital and stayed till he retired in 1989. He was one of the first to use a combined fiberoptic endoscope and gastric camera, he wrote two books and multiple papers, was an examiner to the conjoint board and universities in the UK, Iraq, and India, and served as regional adviser to the North East Thames Regional Health Authority for the Royal College of Physicians. In his retirement Denis continued as a scholar, bibliophile, photographer, and historian of medicine. He lectured and wrote widely and served in various professional societies. He leaves his wife, Rachel; two children; and four grandchildren.

**John W K Ward, John M T Ford**

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**Edwyn Wren Hoskyns**

**Consultant paediatrician, Leicester Royal Infirmary (b 4 February 1956; q Nottingham 1979), died from a head injury after a cycling accident on 19 February 2015.**



Edwyn Wren Hoskyns was a child chorister at King's College, Cambridge. After house jobs he worked in Thailand before his natural empathy with children led him to training in paediatrics, specialising in neonatology and chest medicine. During the 1985 famine he volunteered in Sudan. His medical interests and expertise were eclectic. Wren Hoskyns was one of few senior paediatricians practising both acute paediatrics and neonatology. He was dedicated to, and renowned for, his teaching of junior staff and students. Idiosyncratic, kind, and committed, he loved to challenge absurdity in all walks of life. He remained an accomplished choral singer, violinist, and guitarist.

**Peter Houtman, David Smith**

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**Andrew Cameron Knight Lockie**



**Former general practitioner Stratford-upon-Avon (b 1938; q University of Edinburgh 1966; MBE, BSc, FRCGP, FRCP Ed), d 24 January 2015.**

Andrew Cameron Knight Lockie was the driving force behind the establishment of travel medicine as a recognised specialty in the UK. With a friend, he founded a travel medicine course at the University of Glasgow, where he was an honorary senior clinical lecturer. He coedited the *Textbook of Travel Medicine and Migrant Health*, and in 2003 he was elected president of the British Travel Health Association. He was active in the Royal College of General Practitioners. His interest in the

MRCGP took him to the Middle East, where he was awarded an honorary professorship in family and community health in the Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. He leaves his wife of 50 years, Rosemary; three children; and four grandchildren.

**Alasdair Geddes**

[Cite this as: \*BMJ\* 2015;350:h1957](#)

**Derrick Henry Randall**



**General surgeon and university surgical tutor Sheffield (b 1921; q 1943; FRCS Eng), d 1 March 2015.**

The war interrupted Derrick Henry Randall's medical training—he finished by taking and passing the conjoint examination, rather than waiting for his university degree—but after being demobilised in 1946 he continued and sat his final exams at Westminster Hospital in 1951. In 1954 he was appointed consultant surgeon at Sheffield's Royal Infirmary. He was a tutor and lecturer in surgery at the University of Sheffield and worked as an external examiner in surgery in the UK and abroad. He insisted on weight loss and cessation of smoking in the time before he operated. Derrick was chair of the BMA's Sheffield division in 1968; president of the Association of Surgeons in 1978; and chair of the Sheffield Medical Association in 1984. Predeceased by his wife, Zoe, in 2001, he leaves three children.

**Winston Leigh**

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