

Arkady Arkanov

Soviet GP who became a writer, stand-up comedian, TV anchor, and satirist

Arkady Mikhailovich Shteinbok Arkanov (b 1933; q IM Sechenov First Moscow Medical Institute, 1957), died from lung cancer on 22 March 2015.

Arkady Mikhailovich Shteinbok ("Arkanov" was his pen name) was born in Kiev but moved to Moscow with his family in 1938. He graduated from high school with a silver medal in 1951, and became a student of First Moscow Medical Institute (now the IM Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University).

In his memoirs *Vpered v proshloe* ["Forward to the Past"] Arkanov recalls the antisemitism of that time, when Jews were barred from many prestigious universities. It was relatively easy, however, to enter medical school—especially if you were interested in sports (Arkanov excelled at chess—considered a sport in Russia—and shooting). He participated in students' *kapustniki* [comedy and revue sketches] throughout his studies. In 1957 the medical students' theatre was awarded a silver medal at the first world festival of youth and students in Moscow. Arkanov married Maya Kristalinskaya, the festival laureate, who became a famous singer—but they divorced the following year.

From medical practice to writing

On graduating Arkanov was obliged to work for three years as a district physician in an outpatient clinic in Moscow, where he faced the realities of Soviet medicine: overcrowded clinics, lack of medication, excessive paperwork, low salaries, and so on. He generously handed sick notes to patients whose true reason for requesting leave was not an illness, but a hangover.

Doctors' home visits and hospital tickets were (and still are) free of charge. Arkanov suggested that symbolic payments would reduce the number of unnecessary visits, but he was told that free medical care was one of the great achievements of the Soviet regime.

While visiting a patient he was attacked by a dog, and was left with a scar on his face for the rest of his life.

By that time Arkanov had written many short stories, satirical songs, and monologues for variety artists, and he realised that he had to leave medicine. He regarded combining working as a doctor with another activity as unethical. Some argued that Anton Chekhov had been able to combine writing and medical practice—and



when a journalist asked some years later why he had decided to leave medicine, Arkanov replied: "I realised that I would never become Chekhov." He insisted, however, that everyone should have some medical knowledge as it provided a different perspective on life and would lower mortality: "For example, in England, every policeman can deliver a baby." He called for the teaching of anatomy and physiology to future writers. One of his friends was Vasily Aksyonov, another physician turned writer (<http://www.bmj.com/content/339/bmj.b3280>).

Arkanov's coauthor was Grigory (Ofshtein) Gorin, also a graduate of the Moscow Medical Institute, who worked as an emergency physician. In 1966, on their editor's recommendation, they both changed their Jewish names: Shteinbok became Arkanov, and Ofshtein became Gorin.

They worked together for more than a decade and wrote the lyrics of many popular songs, and several plays that were staged in theatres in Moscow. A phrase

from one of their stage miniatures, "a grand piano in the bushes" (meaning a contrived coincidence), has entered common parlance.

From 1963 to 1967 Arkanov was consultant editor of humour and satire for the popular monthly periodical *Yunost* [Youth], where his first short story was published. In 1968 he joined the Soviet Writers' Union.

In the 1970s Arkanov became a TV star and household name thanks to his own stand-up

comedy and anchoring of comedy shows. Occasionally he played in theatres and cinemas. He considered humour to be "an additional sensory organ of a human being." According to Arkanov, "humour is a vitamin and not a staple diet" and one should overdose on it. A man without a sense of humour, however, is handicapped.

Humour and satire

Arkanov did not distinguish between humour and satire, considering the former as a state of mind and the latter as a targeted method of influencing society and its rulers. Satirists should expect resistance: "A satirist cannot live well; otherwise he is not a satirist." Nevertheless both the Russian president and the prime minister offered condolences to Arkanov's relatives after his death.

He called his writings "non-science fiction." Their absurdity brings to mind Gogol's "laughter through tears." In Arkanov's early miniature, "Langlauf," the hero of the story participates in a 10 km cross country skiing race, which takes ages. On returning home he discovers a farewell note from his wife, who has joined a bobsleigh contest.

Arkanov's humour was sad, and his optimism was gloomy. When asked, during perestroika, to diagnose Russia, he answered that the country had several diseases but the most evident was dementia complicated by dystrophy. He predicted a second iron curtain, which would be stronger than in the late Soviet period, to be followed by dictatorial westernisation and democratisation from above. In his opinion, this would require a complete replacement of the ruling elites. He repeatedly claimed that there are two degrees of freedom: the lowest freedom consists of doing what you want, and the highest freedom is not to do what you do not want.

Elegantly dressed—wearing fashionable jackets, opaque glasses, and funky ties—and chain smoking, Arkanov was known as a "Russian gentleman." He was a football fan, played chess and cards, enjoyed gambling, and recklessly betted on horses. His other passions were women, jazz, and travelling, "because time is slowing down when you travel . . . in a way, my travels are an attempt to stop time."

Predeceased by his three wives, he leaves his partner, Oksana Sokolik (who is about half his age), and two sons.

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John Michael Brudenell



Former consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist (b 1925; q King's College London 1949; FRCS, FRCOG), d 30 March 2015.

John Michael Brudenell ("Mike") spent his early career at King's College Hospital, doing research on endometrial pathology and cervical cytology. He was appointed as a consultant to St Luke's Hospital and the Royal Infirmary in Bradford in 1961. He had expected to spend his consultant life there, but when a vacancy occurred at King's he returned to his alma mater. He worked at King's and the Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead for the rest of his career, as well as running a private practice in Harley Street. He carried out research on the problems of pregnant diabetic women, wrote on the subject, and lectured in the UK and overseas. He served in the RCOG, the RCS, and the charity Birthright. Mike leaves his wife, Mollie; four sons; nine grandchildren; and seven great grandchildren.

John Michael Brudenell

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Euan Cameron Campbell

Former general practitioner Dumbarton (b 1929; q University of Glasgow 1952), died from aortic dissection on 11 March 2015.

Euan Cameron Campbell spent two years' national service in the Royal Army Medical Corps in the Dorset regiment in Hong Kong and ran a mobile army surgical hospital in Korea. In 1956 he joined the McCulloch and Boyd family practice in Dumbarton, where he also worked as medical officer for Allied Distillers. His daughter Pat worked with him for six years before he retired in 1991. He enjoyed his grandchildren and was a keen

sailor, racing on the Firth of Clyde and family cruising on Scotland's west coast. He leaves his wife, Isobel; four children; and 11 grandchildren.

Pat Mill

Cite this as: BMJ 2015;350:h2603

Edmund Augustine Dowling



Emeritus professor of pathology (b 1927; q University College Cork 1951), d 9 February 2015.

Edmund Augustine Dowling emigrated from Ireland to the US in 1952. In 1968 he became director of surgical pathology and professor of pathology at the University of Alabama in Birmingham, Alabama. In 1965 he became a member of the Birmingham Sailing Club and raced in many local and national events. He also served a term as the club's commodore. From 1974 to 1981 Edmund was acting chairman of the pathology department at the University of South Alabama in Mobile and served as director of surgical pathology and professor of pathology until he retired as professor emeritus in 1993. Predeceased by his first wife, Joan, he leaves his second wife, Sandra; two sons; two daughters; and three grandchildren.

Sandra Dowling

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Kenneth Sutherland Mackenzie



Former general practitioner (b 1927; q Glasgow 1950), d 22 March 2015.

Kenneth Sutherland Mackenzie ("Ken") did his national service with the Royal Scots Greys in the Middle East from 1951 to 1953. Among more mundane tasks he sutured the torn underbelly of the colonel's horse while standing underneath it. Ken sustained a fractured toe, but the horse went on to win the regimental steeplechase later that year. Ken also had to immunise all who had been in contact with the regiment's dog, which had contracted rabies. After his return he did junior hospital jobs in the Glasgow area. He met his wife to be, Jean, while working as a junior surgeon in Greenock. Ken spent 33 years as a singlehanded GP in Oldham; he also worked as a police surgeon and was active on the local medical committee. He leaves Jean; four children; and eight grandchildren.

K Roderick Mackenzie

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James Samuel Young Mathewson



Former general practitioner Lisburn, Northern Ireland (b 1925; q Queen's University, Belfast, 1952; DOBst RCOG), died from pneumonia on 23 December 2014.

James Samuel Young Mathewson attended Coleraine Academical Institution, where he was a keen rugby player. On leaving school he joined the Royal Air Force and completed his pilot training in Rhodesia just as the war ended. He returned home and studied medicine at Queen's University, Belfast. In 1954 he joined a general practice in Lisburn, where he remained throughout his career. He was closely involved in the establishment of Lisburn Health Centre in 1977 and retired from the practice in 1990, but he continued to work as medical referee until 1995. He was president of Lisburn Rotary Club in 1973-74 and president of Lisburn

Rugby Club in 1985. Predeceased by his daughter, he leaves his wife, Kay; and three sons.

T Mathewson

Cite this as: BMJ 2015;350:h2608

Ruban Prasad



General practitioner (b 1942; q Patna 1965; FRCS Glas, FRCGP), d 24 March 2015.

Roopendra Kumar Prasad ("Ruban") was a general practitioner in Preston for more than 30 years and an enthusiastic and active member of the BMA, which he joined in 1974. He was a member of the BMA's Council from 1998 to 2001 and of its General Practitioners Committee between 1992 and 2003. At some point he was a member of the BMA's international committee. Ruban came to England in 1968. He married Lynda in 1973, and the couple had three children. He retired from general practice in 2008 but continued to serve on committees and became an active and popular member of Leyland Golf Club. In 2014 he was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis and, although his life expectancy was several more years, a bronchial infection caused his sudden death.

Kailash Chand, Sanjay Prasad

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