

Priscilla Kincaid-Smith

Kidney specialist who overcame gender barriers in Australia to become a national and global leader in medicine

Priscilla Kincaid-Smith (b 1926, q Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1950), died from complications after a stroke on 18 July 2015.

In late 1958, Priscilla Kincaid-Smith arrived in Melbourne, newly married to her Australian husband and eager to resume her medical career. Born and raised in South Africa, she had excelled during the previous six years, training and conducting medical research at Hammersmith Hospital in London. She was in for a shock: married female doctors in Australia could not be employed at a university or a hospital. She eventually became an internationally acclaimed nephrologist, while at the same time opening doors in Australia that previously had been closed to women.

Perhaps the most important of her many medical accomplishments, which include authorship of more than 430 research papers, was the work that helped establish the causal link between the use of compound analgesics and kidney damage, now commonly called analgesic nephropathy. After helping establish the link, she successfully campaigned against their use in Australia, saving perhaps thousands of lives.

“She, simply put, was a giant in our specialty,” says William M Bennett, a past president of the American Society of Nephrology who is now medical director of kidney transplantation at Legacy Health Systems in the United States. “She insisted on excellence and could not abide mediocrity. She was persistent and relentless in pursuing her goals, but I found her warm and genuine.”

Bennett adds that Kincaid-Smith’s “contributions are too numerous to count.” Colleagues say that in addition to describing analgesic associated kidney disease, her contributions include describing the features and treatment of many causes of glomerulonephritis, understanding pre-eclampsia and renal disease of pregnancy, helping establish kidney transplants in Australia, understanding and treatment of malignant hypertension, and work in reflux nephropathy and urinary infection.

Analgesic nephropathy

Kincaid-Smith began investigating analgesic nephropathy in early 1959—only weeks after arriving in Melbourne and beginning work as a research fellow at the Baker Institute. She had trained in pathology in London, and each day—out of habit—would visit the autopsy room at Alfred Hospital in Melbourne. She observed what she would later describe as “extraordinary” lesions on the kidneys of recently deceased

patients. She was baffled, as she had never seen this form of renal papillary necrosis in her six years in London.

Kincaid-Smith questioned attending pathologists, and they told her that this papillary necrosis was “a very common result of infection” in Australia. Kincaid-Smith was sceptical. “I found it difficult right at the start to accept that it could possibly be the result of infection,” she later said.²

Kincaid-Smith credited her husband and frequent research partner, renal physician Ken Fairley, with helping point her in the right direction. Fairley told her that some of his patients who had developed renal failure had a history of intense use of compound analgesics. She followed that trail and, after years of persistent investigation, helped conclusively identify compound analgesics as the culprit behind the kidney damage.

At the time, compound analgesics in powder form were sold in Australian supermarkets and widely used. They contained the analgesics aspirin and phenacetin, but also caffeine, which helped make them addictive. Often called by the abbreviation APCs (aspirin, phenacetin, caffeine), the two most widely used APCs in Australia were Bex Powders and Vincent’s Powders.

Through the 1960s and into the 1970s Kincaid-Smith was the author of significant papers on analgesic nephropathy in various journals, including *The BMJ* and *The Lancet*.³⁻⁶

From physical education to medicine

Priscilla Sheath Kincaid-Smith trained in medicine and surgery until 1953 at Baragwanath Hospital in Johannesburg. It was a sprawling 2000 bed hospital, and she worked seven days and four nights a week, treating a long list of diseases including malaria, typhoid, and amoebic hepatitis.

In 1953 she moved to London, initially training in pathology under J Henry Dible at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School at the Hammersmith Hospital, but she soon realised she preferred

working with patients. After three years of pathology she switched to cardiology and became interested in the kidney. She was mentored by John McMichael.

In May 1958, over an autopsy, she met Ken Fairley, who was training in London at the National Heart Hospital. Kincaid-Smith later said of their whirlwind romance: “Ken and I met in May 1958, got engaged in June, got married in July, and came out to Australia at the end of the year.”

In 1961, after nearly three years in Melbourne, Kincaid-Smith was offered a position at the University of Melbourne, as a senior associate in medicine. She was involved in setting up the renal transplant programme at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, where in 1967 she became director of nephrology. In 1968 she was founding member of the non-profit organisation Kidney Health Australia and in 1975 named professor of medicine at Melbourne University.

In addition to her academic and clinical duties, Kincaid-Smith was highly active in Australian and international medical societies. Her many honours include the Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE). Kincaid-Smith was compulsorily retired in 1991 at age 65 from the university and the Royal Melbourne Hospital—a traumatic experience that left her “bitterly disappointed” and in “sort of a vacuum for some time,” she later said. She remained active, however, and in 1994 was named to a one year term as president of the World Medical Association.

In a Q&A with the *Lancet* in 1999 she spoke of relaxing with her husband at weekends by working—with only one helper—on their 1000 acre beef cattle property. Her advice to young doctors: “Choose an area in which you can wake each day with enthusiasm to get back to work.”⁷

Kincaid-Smith leaves her husband, and three children.

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Priscilla Kincaid-Smith was determined to enter into—and excel in—a system that denied women full and equal employment opportunities

John Patrick Anderson



Former consultant in chest and infectious diseases Taunton and Somerset Hospitals (b 1924; q Durham 1947; MD; FRCPE), died from peripheral ischaemia of limbs on 17 May 2015.

After professional house jobs at the Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle upon Tyne, John Patrick Anderson served with Airborne Medical Services. After successive training posts, he was appointed at Taunton to a new combined consultancy in 1962. From 1971 to 1976 he served also as inaugural chairman of the medical executive committee. His publications and interests concerned tuberculosis, ornithosis, and other zoonoses. After retiring from the NHS in 1989 he took the London DTMH and then made nine working trips to St Francis's Mission Hospital in eastern Zambia. He leaves a wife, Dorothy; five sons; and a daughter from his first marriage.

**John Patrick Anderson,
Dorothy Anderson**
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John Joseph Hamblin



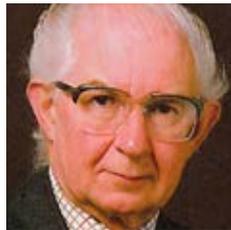
Former consultant physician Southend Hospital (b 1934; q London Hospital 1958; FRCP), died from cholangiocarcinoma on 31 August 2014

John Hamblin ("JJ") was appointed consultant physician at Southend Hospital in 1967. Although his primary interest was diabetology, he always saw himself as a general physician. His achievements included the setting up of the intensive care unit at Southend Hospital and the establishment of a

dedicated multidisciplinary diabetes day centre. It is likely, however, that his colleagues' fondest memories may be for his letter writing: he was the notorious author of highly candid letters. He was diagnosed with cholangiocarcinoma in 2013 and opted for radical surgery. He leaves his wife, Mary; four sons; and eight grandchildren.

M Hamblin
Cite this as: [BMJ 2015;351:h4943](#)

David Harold Jones



Retired obstetrician and gynaecologist Hartlepool (b 1923; q Cambridge/London Hospital 1954; MA, FRCOG), d 25 December 2014.

After specialist training David Harold Jones was appointed consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist to the northern regional health authority and was based at Cameron Hospital, Hartlepool. Involved in raising standards of care in a district that was facing difficult economic conditions, Harold was an expert in the management of acute inversion of the uterus, and also in operating on very obese patients. Before anaesthetists became involved in this area, he undertook training in epidural analgesia and provided this service for his patients. This interest mirrored his concern for the pain, both physical and mental, experienced by patients. Harold leaves his widow, Margaret, four children, and six grandchildren.

W G Dawson
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Ardeshir Shiavax (Eddie) Khambata

Consultant otolaryngologist (b 1936; q 1959; FRCS), died from pancreatic cancer on 2 June 2015. Ardeshir Shiavax Khambata ("Eddie") was eagerly sought after for an opinion whenever opera singers had problems. Born in Bombay and educated at the Cathedral Boys' School, he went on to

qualify in medicine from Grant Medical College. He moved to London and was a senior registrar at the London Hospital, before obtaining his position as a consultant in ear, nose, and throat medicine at West Hill and Joyce Green hospitals in Dartford, Kent, and Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup. A bon viveur, expert in French cooking, and a devout Parsee Zoroastrian, Eddie returned to his roots in Bombay in his retirement. Symptoms in recent months led to a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, to which he ultimately succumbed.

Rumi Kapadia
Cite this as: [BMJ 2015;351:h4439](#)

John Harmar Mott

Regional medical officer Department of Health and Social Security (b 1922; q Oxford/Middlesex Hospital, London, 1952; MRCP), d 15 May 2015.

After qualifying John Harmar Mott was offered a position in a general practice in Southport. He became secretary of Southport local medical committee and medical officer at Sunnyside Hospital, also to the British Legion, the Home for the Blind, and the Children's Home in Southport, and he was a founder member of the Royal College of General Practitioners. He also took part in medical research. In 1969 he left general practice and became regional medical officer at the DHSS. At the age of 71 he retired, which allowed him to go back to his classical interests. He leaves Elizabeth, his wife of 64 years; three children; six grandchildren; and two great grandchildren.

Alison Mott
Cite this as: [BMJ 2015;351:h4435](#)

Patrick Offley Porter Newell



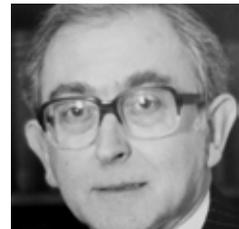
Former general practitioner Plymouth (b 1920; q 1952), died from Alzheimer's disease on 12 November 2014.

Patrick Offley Porter Newell worked briefly as a journalist for a local paper

in Suffolk before being called up into the Essex Regiment. After fracturing his ankle and subsequently contracting rheumatic fever, he was deemed unfit for active service and was transferred to the Ordnance Corps as an engineer. On being demobbed he trained at St Mary's Hospital in London. After briefly working as an assistant GP in Callington, Cornwall, he joined a private practice in Plymouth. He retired in 1985, and after successful treatment for an acoustic neuroma and colon cancer, he and his wife, Hilary, moved to Cornwall, where he completely refurbished their house and garden. He leaves Hilary; two daughters, and two granddaughters.

Antonia Newell
Cite this as: [BMJ 2015;351:h4297](#)

Francis William O'Grady



Foundation professor of microbiology University of Nottingham (b 1925; q Middlesex Hospital Medical School 1950; CBE, MD, FRCP, FRCPath, FFPM), d 20 May 2015.

Francis William O'Grady was an international authority on antimicrobial chemotherapy and urinary and airborne infections. During his career he held many academic posts, did a two year research fellowship at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, USA, and became foundation professor of microbiology at the new medical school in Nottingham. He sat on and chaired national committees for the Medical Research Council, the Department of Health, and the Public Health Laboratory Service, as well as many professional bodies and journals. He wrote numerous scientific papers and was coauthor of *Antibiotic and Chemotherapy* from its second to seventh editions. Predeceased by Madeleine, his wife of 57 years, he leaves three daughters, five grandchildren, and two great grandchildren.

Richard Slack
Cite this as: [BMJ 2015;351:h4281](#)