

OBITUARIES

Donald John Carr Horwood

Jo Scott-Jones

Former general practitioner and surgeon (b 1924; q London 1951; MRCS), d 1 April 2013.

Donald John Carr Horwood (“Don”) was born in Harrow, England, and after prolonged childhood illnesses interrupted his schooling he became determined to become either an engineer or a doctor. Despite humble beginnings, he persisted with his education, was admitted to and survived medical school through the war years, and went on to complete his clinical training at Charing Cross Hospital in London.

His starting salary in 1952 was four pounds ten a week, four pounds of which the hospital kept for board and lodging. During this time Don became interested and skilled in surgery and married Ruth, a fellow student.

Don and his young dentist wife moved to Uganda in 1955, where he worked as a surgeon and district medical officer serving a population of 230 000 with two other doctors. It was during this time that he undertook an operation that he later described as the high point of his career—with characteristic humility and compassion he described the procedure of gradually releasing the contractures, caused by polio, of a village boy, enabling him to walk for the first time in eight years. The feeling Don had when he saw the elation and gratitude of the boy’s father never left him.

The Horwood family first came to New Zealand in 196, where Don took up the role of surgeon superintendent and part time general practitioner in Riverton. He also became deputy mayor and learnt to fly, but the call back to Africa was strong, and in 1966 the family moved back for Don to become a chief medical officer at Kilembe Copper Mine in Uganda. Don was unhappy

with the treatment of the local miners, and after working out his year’s contract he looked around for the next adventure.

Canada beckoned, and Don’s life took another turn. As zone director for the eastern Arctic, and later for the whole of the Yukon peninsula, Don was employed by the federal government to manage health services for vast regions of rural Canada, and, although he reflected on this time regretting the lack of clinical work, and only occasional surgery he managed to perform, he performed with distinction, and the responsibilities were huge.

In 1971 Don and Ruth decided to return to New Zealand. The Opotiki Lions organisation rang him, and he was attracted to become the surgical superintendent to Opotiki Hospital, a post he left in 1974, taking a full time position as the town’s then only general practitioner.

Don did not talk much about his life as a GP in Opotiki, reflecting that his life’s passion was surgery. Locally he is remembered as a wonderful GP, who freely gave of his time and energy; who went out of his way to help families deal with poverty and disability; who saw a limping child in the street and stopped, made her take him to her mother, explained the slipped epiphysis, and arranged surgery to repair the damage; who supported families with budgeting advice; and who set up, along with his wife, a scholarship that still helps Maori women in tertiary education.

Don was a real gentleman; and a dedicated rural physician, surgeon, and father. He leaves his wife, Ruth, and two sons, David and John.

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