

OBITUARIES

Robert Fife

Frank Dunn

Consultant physician and cardiologist (b 1922; q Glasgow 1945; FRCP Glas, FRCP Lon), d 2 September 2013.

Robert Fife was widely regarded as one of the outstanding physicians and cardiologists of his generation. After a distinguished undergraduate career and a period of military service in North Africa, his early postgraduate training was at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, and it was there he became interested in cardiology, under the supervision of J H Wright. Dr Wright was a most influential figure in Glasgow medicine and in the development of cardiology. Robert Fife was one of his protégés, and this period laid the foundation for his future as a well rounded physician and cardiologist with consummate clinical skills and in all aspects of electrocardiology

The tendency for specialisation in recent years has resulted in a decrease in the development and popularity of the generalist as a career. It is of interest that in our current ageing population, the generalist is much needed, and this is now being recognised and promoted. Robert Fife exemplified this with his ability to look at all aspects of the patient, and such an approach optimised their management. He promoted what he termed as “the working diagnoses” and would document these in the notes with his famous red pen. When his trainees documented their list and he concurred, he would simply write “agreed” with his red pen. This, for the trainee, was the ultimate accolade.

He contributed substantially in other areas. He was an honorary senior lecturer at the University of Glasgow. He was a host and senior examiner in the MRCP examinations and was chair of the Glasgow Blood Pressure Clinic Executive, which developed innovative computers in several key research projects, with publication of a considerable number of articles in this area.

He was chairman of the influential area medical committee in Glasgow, which advised the health board on key issues. In this role, his preference was always for collaboration rather than confrontation.

He was the most likely choice when colleagues themselves were unwell. He appreciated the need for communicating with patients and providing them with a clear explanation of their condition. Robert Fife exemplified all the characteristics of a complete physician. His colleagues, students, and, most importantly, patients, were all beneficiaries of this remarkably talented doctor. He was predeceased by his wife, Isabel, in 1992. He leaves his daughter, Anne; a son, R John Fife (a doctor); two grandchildren; and his companion, Barbara Johnston.

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