



OBITUARIES

Ian Forgacs: flamboyant and modernising president of the British Society of Gastroenterology

Penny Warren

London



Ian Forgacs

[Image: Credit: Helen Forgacs]

Those at the 2016 awayday of the British Gastroenterology Society (BSG) did not expect Hamlet's soliloquy to be on the agenda. But Ian Forgacs, the president, delighted in the unexpected. On the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, he performed the speech to a rapt audience. He was shrewd man with a disarming manner, and, as a colleague said, "He was born to be president. He handled it with aplomb."

Forgacs worked to modernise the BSG and promote links worldwide, securing a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese Society of Gastroenterology. He was instrumental in delivering better training, including developing the specialty certificate examination, and he championed initiatives such as getting faster access to endoscopy.

Early years

Ian Christopher Forgacs was born on 13 October 1951 in Bromley, Kent. His mother, Eileen, was a nurse and his Hungarian father, Paul, a chest physician.

Forgacs and his younger brother, David, attended Sevenoaks School, where he played rugby, but his abiding passion was football. As a young boy he wanted to play for England, and it was a highlight to be at Wembley seeing England win the World Cup in 1966. Throughout his life he supported Charlton Athletic and later Arsenal.

In 1969 Forgacs enrolled at Guy's Hospital in London to study medicine. He spent his elective year in the US, at Yale School of Medicine. He worked for gastroenterologist Howard M Spiro

and decided to do his thesis on gastrin and make gastroenterology his career.

Forgacs qualified in 1975. In the same year he met his future wife, Helen, a nurse on the intensive care unit. They married in 1978 and had two children—Nicholas in 1979 and Sarah in 1983.

Forgacs had several registrar jobs at Guy's and St Thomas's hospitals in London, as well as a year at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge, and he enjoyed being on the acute medical "take."

Consultant and president of BSG

In 1986 Forgacs became a consultant at King's College Hospital, where he remained throughout his career. The prestigious liver unit dominated gastroenterology, with over 100 staff, whereas Forgacs was one of just four working in "hollow organ" gastroenterology. He made his career in this context, and a long term colleague believed it taught him resilience.

At King's, Forgacs developed his gift for teaching, delivering lively lectures with enough gut humour to hold his audience's attention. He was committed to supporting junior colleagues, one of whom said Forgacs brought to mind Barnabas, the biblical character who symbolised encouragement.

Although he had a playful side, Forgacs took medicine very seriously and was widely respected. According to a GP colleague, "He gave good clinical opinions and didn't overtreat."

Not long after becoming a consultant, Forgacs joined *The BMJ*'s "hanging committee." Taking its name from the Royal Academy committee that decides which pictures to hang, *The BMJ*'s committee decides which research to publish. For more than 10 years, Forgacs volunteered insightful opinions.

Forgacs had a growing role at the BSG. He became chair of the training committee and chaired the specialist advisory committee, which in 2008 rewrote the curriculum, a task one colleague described as "gargantuan." He had a talent for running committees—he could think strategically and get the right people on board.

In 2012 he became president elect of the BSG and in 2014 president or, as he put it, "top banana." He used his position to encourage different groups, from nurses and GPs to trainees

and fellow consultants, and helped the society to become more outward looking. One colleague described the alliance with China as “a game changer,” and another said it was a triumph to set up the GMC recognised specialty certificate examination in gastroenterology.

Drama, music, and other interests

In parallel to medicine, Forgacs had many interests. He had a party personality and many friends. One said: “You’d think, ‘Ian’s here, now it’s going to be fun!’”

In private, music nourished his soul, especially the works of Mozart. He went to the opera regularly and flew to New York to hear Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*. His reading spanned Montaigne and the classics, as well as James Bond, of which he owned

several first editions. He went to the theatre every week and when he retired applied to study acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. He also travelled to South Africa, Germany, and France to support England in the World Cup.

Shortly after he retired in 2016, Forgacs was diagnosed with cancer. He died in St John’s Hospice 10 days after his 67th birthday. Ian Forgacs leaves his wife, Helen, and two children.

Biography

Ian Christopher Forgacs (b 1951; q 1975; MRCP), died from cancer on 23 October 2018

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