

Peter Higgins

Championed general practice as an academic specialty

Peter Higgins was a champion of general practice education in the years before vocational training became mandatory, and he was a key figure in community development in Thamesmead, the new town where he worked as a general practitioner for 30 years.

After hospital jobs at University College Hospital, London, where he qualified in 1947, he worked in general practices in Rugeley, a mining village in Staffordshire, and Castle Vale, a new housing development in Birmingham, and he saw the need for services provided by a range of professionals working from purpose built health centres, which were still rare in the 1960s. Interested in the links between social deprivation and illness, he believed that many patients could be kept out of hospital if given more effective primary care.

Practice in Thamesmead

In 1968 he was appointed senior lecturer in general practice at Guy's Hospital Medical School, with responsibility to set up a teaching practice in Thamesmead, the new London County Council development planned to house 60 000 people.

He jumped at the opportunity even though it meant working single handed in a hut initially. "Here was a chance to develop a comprehensive health service with a special emphasis on primary care for a large population in a capital city and also provide a teaching unit in the community for Guy's medical and dental students," he wrote (*BMJ* 1982;285:1564-6, doi:10.1136/bmj.285.6354.1564).

By 1982 there were six partners, all of whom taught at Guy's as well as seeing patients, and Lakeside, the purpose built health centre, housed the community dental service and provided consultant clinics in psychiatry, surgery, paediatrics, dermatology, gynaecology, and rheumatology as well as counselling services.

Appointed regional adviser in general practice for South East Thames in 1970, and professor of general practice at Guy's in 1974, Higgins, who has died aged 86, also developed a master of science degree in general practice.

He always emphasised the importance of getting to know patients in their own settings. Medical students visited patients in their homes, asking them about their problems and experi-

ence of health services. Social work students also spent time in the practice.

"Peter felt strongly that you couldn't learn about general practice from reading a book, and he was thrilled when some of the best students at Guy's chose general practice when they qualified," said his widow, Jean, a nurse and midwife, who met her husband when they were both working at University College London hospital.

"We agreed that we would analyse problems fully from the start, help people to understand why they fell ill, encourage self reliance, and restrict prescribing to what was indicated for good medical reasons," he wrote.

"Innovation was always encouraged and there was an emphasis on taking all aspects of a patient's situation into account," said Nigel Masters, a general practitioner in High Wycombe, who visited Lakeside as a student at Guy's and then joined the practice in 1982, staying for 10 years. Families' medical notes were grouped together in large folders, and staff were encouraged to draw out family trees.

John Howie, former professor of general practice at Edinburgh University, and coauthor with Michael Whitfield of a forthcoming book on academic general practice units, said, "Peter was one of a small group who championed medical student teaching in the early 1970s, when the climate for teaching of this kind was extremely difficult. He was also the first person to combine being a professor of general practice and regional adviser in general practice."

Vice chairman of South East Thames regional health authority for 16 years, he also served on

the attendance allowance board and was a trustee of the Thamesmead Community Association and a former president of the general practice section of the Royal Society of Medicine.

He was awarded the OBE in 1987 and retired in 1988, but maintained a keen interest in Thamesmead, writing the preface to an account of its history, *Thamesmead: A Social History*, by Virginia Wigfall, published in 2009.

A Clockwork Orange

"Peter came to Thamesmead when it was a building site, and his energy and commitment made him a key member of the community," said Wigfall. Virginia Todd, a general practitioner who has worked at the practice for 31 years, believes his influence is still evident. "*A Clockwork Orange* was filmed here, and of course there are problems, but Thamesmead is still an exciting place to work, and that's partly due to Peter's approach. He believed staff could be ener-

gised. I'll be 61 this week, and I still like coming in." Higgins leaves his wife, Jean, three sons, and a daughter.

Joanna Lyall j.lyall@ision.co.uk

Peter Matthew Higgins, professor of general practice (b 1923; q 1947, University College Hospital, London), died on 10 June 2010 from bronchopneumonia, dementia, and old age.

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- Thamesmead: dream to reality (*BMJ* 1982;285:1564-6)
- Thamesmead: lessons learnt (*BMJ* 1982;285:1631-3)
- Research: Acute nephritis and streptococcal sore throat: a prospective study in general practice (*BMJ* 1965;2:1156-60)



"Peter was thrilled when some of the best students at Guy's chose general practice when they qualified"

Hazel Margaret Finlay



Former general practitioner Brookeborough and Tempo, County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland (b 1933; q Trinity College Dublin 1956), d 9 January 2011.

Hazel Margaret Finlay followed her mother, who trained as a nurse in Belfast, into a caring profession. After qualifying, Hazel worked for a year in Route Hospital, Ballymoney, County Antrim, and then in England—in Kent and Sussex Hospital, Tunbridge Wells—and Wales, in general practice in Aberdare. She returned to Northern Ireland and became a partner in 1966 in a rural practice with surgeries in Brookeborough and Tempo for 27 years. She was kind and conscientious, and her diagnostic skills were often highly praised by hospital consultants in Erne Hospital, Enniskillen, to whom she referred patients. She retired in 1993 and moved to Ballymoney to be near her family. She leaves two sisters and four nieces and three nephews.

Lesley Abbott

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Kenneth Gordon Lowe



Former consultant physician and professor of medicine Dundee Royal Infirmary and University of Dundee (b 1917; q St Andrews 1941; CVO, MD, FRCP, DSc), d 13 August 2010. Kenneth Gordon Lowe ("Ken") qualified with the gold medal and served in the Royal Army Medical Corps before joining the

Postgraduate Medical School at Hammersmith Hospital. He worked on Britain's first artificial kidney, publishing pioneering research on acute renal failure which led to his MD thesis with a gold medal. From his appointment in 1952 as senior lecturer in medicine at St Andrews University he did groundbreaking work on intracardiac electrocardiography (ultimately leading to ablative treatment of some arrhythmias). He taught and trained many students and postgraduates, was a widely respected clinician, and was physician to the Queen in Scotland. Predeceased by his wife, Nancy, in 1999, he leaves three children and five grandchildren.

Gordon Lowe

Graham Lowe

Hugh MacDougall

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Afolabi Michael Sawyerr



Consultant gastroenterologist Whipps Cross Hospital, London (b 1957; q Cardiff 1982; MD, FRCP), died from renal cell carcinoma on 1 July 2010. After house jobs in Wales, Afolabi Michael Sawyerr ("Af") specialised in London and Edinburgh, including researching for his MD at the Royal Free Hospital, and working as a senior lecturer at Western General Hospital. Appointed consultant gastroenterologist at Whipps Cross in 1995, Af had a particular interest in inflammatory bowel disease. He was a keen and proficient endoscopist and screened for early bowel cancer. He designed the endoscopy unit at Whipps Cross, since named the Sawyerr Endoscopy Unit in his memory; established and led a multidisciplinary nutrition team; and chaired a nutrition action team. A master of communication, he

worked extremely hard, and was respected and admired. He leaves a wife, Heather, and three children.

Hannah Sawyerr

Liz Carty

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Pamela Mary Spencer (née Bacon)



Former consultant in obstetrics and gynaecology Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Whittington Hospitals, London (b 1926; q University College Hospital, London, 1950; FRCS, FRCOG), died from complications of vascular dementia on 30 May 2010. Pamela Mary Spencer (née Bacon) ("Pam") completed junior doctor jobs in London and Cambridge before gaining her FRCS in 1957. Her work on controlled cord traction during the third stage of labour led to an influential *BMJ* paper in 1962. A campaigner throughout her career, she was passionate about the right of women to choose a female gynaecologist, spearheading a successful campaign to save the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital. Pam enjoyed travel and was a keen sportswoman, learning to play golf in her 60s. She remained determinedly independent. Predeceased by her husband, Spike, in 2005, she leaves a son and a grandson.

Charles Spencer

Kathleen Thickett

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Rose Margaret Fraser Stellman

Former principal medical officer London Borough of Bexley (b 1916; q Aberdeen 1939), d 18 December 2010. After qualification and house jobs, Rose Margaret Fraser Stellman

hoped to specialise in obstetrics in Aberdeen, but found a niche in caring for sick and premature babies, studying feeds, weights, and development on a fellowship. After marrying Guy Stellman, she moved to Kent, becoming assistant county medical officer in 1961 and then principal medical officer for Bexley. She campaigned for better schooling for children with disabilities, challenged the prejudice against children with Down's syndrome, and helped to establish two special needs schools in Bexley Borough, as well as running an assessment clinic for many years. She was also very active in her local Baptist church. Predeceased by Guy in 1989 and by a daughter, she leaves two children and five grandchildren.

Carole M Stellman

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Robert Nicol Traquair Thin

Former consultant physician in genitourinary medicine Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals (b 1935; q Edinburgh 1959; OBE, MD, FRCP), died from prostate cancer on 16 July 2010.

Robert Nicol Traquair Thin ("Nicol") rowed for Scotland in the coxed fours in the 1958 Commonwealth Games. After specialising in venereology in the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), he became consultant in his native Edinburgh and then London, while also being specialty adviser to the director general of the RAMC. He edited the specialist journal (now called *Sexually Transmitted Infections*) and chaired both specialist societies (now joined as the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH)), as well as advising the chief medical officer for 15 years during the HIV epidemic. He was the first director of research at Guy's and St Thomas', and chaired the national ethics committee of the former Public Health Laboratory Service. He leaves a wife, Ann, and two sons.

James Bingham

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