

What do you do when you don't have a diagnosis?

Investigators at the University of British Columbia and colleagues at the University of Calgary have launched a study investigating uncertainty in medical diagnosis. Health services researcher Dr Jude Kornelsen and family physician Dr Robert Woollard, both academic faculty in the Department of Family Practice at UBC, are interviewing physicians and patients for this Canadian Institutes of Health Research-funded study.

Current diagnostic models in medical practice do not adequately account for patient symptoms that cannot be classified. Both medical and social culture expect a diagnosis and treatment protocol for symptoms. When this is not forthcoming, practitioners and patients alike may experience frustration and anxiety. The investigators are interested in how physicians respond to this uncertainty, how they communicate ambiguity in diagnoses to colleagues and patients, and which resources they opt to employ in relating to patients and addressing treatment options. The goal of this investigation is to examine how clinicians and patients conceptualize medical uncertainty within a disease-based framework.

This two-part exploratory qualitative study will use in-depth, guided, open-ended interviewing to document physicians' and patients' experiences of ambiguous diagnosis guided by a phenomenological framework. For more information or to participate in this study, please contact the investigators, Dr Jude Kornelsen (jude.kornelsen@familymed.ubc.ca), Dr Robert Woollard (Woollard@familymed.ubc.ca) or the study coordinator, Leslie Carty (leslie@crhr.ca).



Dr Ian B.D. Middlemass 1925–2011

Ian was born in Hawick, Scotland. He attended school there and later in Edinburgh.

He went on to study medicine at Edinburgh University, from where he graduated in 1947. He spent some time in general practice in southern England. Then he settled in Newcastle, where he embarked on the study of diagnostic radiology at the Royal Infirmary. He spent 5 years between Newcastle and Manchester.

On a ski vacation to Finse in Norway, he met and fell for a Swedish lass, Ingrid Anderson. Soon they became engaged, and they were married in Sweden in 1956.

Ian completed his radiological training by spending 2 years in Dundee, obtaining his specialist degree in radiology.

Ian's next move in 1964 was to the New World. Ingrid and Ian spent 3 years at Ann Arbor in Michigan before moving to Winnipeg in 1967, where Ian practised for 3 more years. Ian then decided to acquire the Canadian Fellowship in radiology, and enrolled at McMaster University for a final 2 years of study.

Now fully qualified, Ian settled in Kamloops in 1971. He became a valued member of the Department of Radiology at the Royal Inland Hospital. He retired in 1990 and was much lauded for the quality of his work.

Ian's second great love was golf, at which he excelled. He became a member of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club at St. Andrews. For the past 20 years he was an honorary member of this prestigious club.

Ian was a man of great kindness and charm. He was modest to a fault. His fine sense of humor gave pleasure to his many friends. He will be sadly missed, and is survived by his wife, Ingrid.

—W.J. McLaren, MD
Kamloops

Comment by Dr J.W. Spragge

Golf with Ian was an adventure. He arrived at the first tee in his daily work clothes, a bag of a few old mismatched clubs clutched in one hand. Without a warm-up we were then treated to an exhibition of old-style links golf. Ian enjoyed the 19th hole drinks, paid for by his opponents.

His sense of humor was legendary. Nothing was free of mockery, including himself. A sample report gleaned from many stated, "The lung fields are moderately distended. The overall appearance is mildly equivocal and virtual normality is possibly favored."

I miss him, as do his many friends around the world.

—J.W. Spragge, MD
Kamloops

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