



Dr Gary Romalis 1937–2014

Dr Gary (Garson) Romalis, MD, FRCSC, was born on 23 October 1937 and died on 30 January 2014 after an acute illness. Gary graduated from UBC in 1962 where, in his second year, he was assigned a life-altering case review of the tragic death of a young woman due to septic abortion using slippery elm bark. At that time, abortion was illegal in Canada and the US. In 1962 Gary chose to go to the Cook County Hospital in Chicago for his internship and residency, where his first rotation was on a ward full of women with complications of septic abortions, several of whom died. Returning to Vancouver to practise in 1972, soon after the change in Canadian law, he learned how to perform abortions because he and his practice partners believed strongly that a woman should be able to decide for herself if and when to have a baby.

Dr Romalis practised obstetrics and gynecology at Vancouver General Hospital until obstetrics moved to Grace Hospital (now BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre) in 1982. His practice also included the Elizabeth Bagshaw Women's Clinic, where he was medical director. He

was instrumental in setting up the CARE program at BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre 20 years ago and continued to work there until his recent hospitalization. He and his colleagues suffered from significant harassment, with protesters visiting his home and his office. In 1994, as painfully remembered by many, Gary almost died from a sniper attack while sitting in his kitchen. He demonstrated amazing courage and perseverance when he eventually returned to work, only to face another attempt on his life 6 years later when a stranger stabbed him in his office building. Gary was drawn to obstetrics and gynecology because of his love of delivering babies, but after these events he was unable to continue his practice of obstetrics. He was, however, clear that he would take the necessary security precautions and continue to provide abortion services.

His inspiring commitment was felt across North America and beyond. In 2001 members of the National Abortion Federation (NAF) awarded him the C. Lalor Burdick Award, which honors unsung heroes in the pro-choice movement whose work exemplifies the excellence, commitment, and dedication that are the ideals of NAF members.

A clinical professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at UBC, Dr Romalis was sought after as a teacher and mentor by medical students, residents, specialists, and family medicine colleagues from across the country. He was instrumental in initiating the Canadian branch of Medical Students for Choice. He was always interested in new opportunities to improve how abortion care was delivered for women. Women thanked him not only for their surgery, but also for what he did.

He was a soft-spoken, kind, humble man, with a quirky sense of humor

and a big smile. Family was very important to him; he was proud of the accomplishments of his *mishpochah* and he loved spending time with his six grandchildren. He was also a pillar of the Jewish community. Gary is survived by his wife of 45 years, Sheila, and his three daughters and their families.

He will be remembered as a hero by many.

The family would appreciate any donations be directed to Congregation Beth Israel to go toward the Beth Israel Building Fund (call 604 731-4161 or e-mail info@bethisrael.ca), to the BC Women's Hospital CARE Clinic, or to the Elizabeth Bagshaw Women's Clinic.

—Dorothy Shaw, MBCChB
Vancouver

Recently deceased physicians

The following physicians have died over the past year; please consider submitting a piece for our "In Memoriam" section in the *BCMJ* if you knew the deceased well.

Barry, Dr Macdonald Lloyd
George

Bond, Dr Mason Christopher

Botha, Dr Johan Hendrik

Bowers, Dr Leslie Stuart

Clews, Dr Alan Godfrey

Devlin, Dr John Desmond

Ogorman

Ditchburn, Dr Frederick George

Dormaar, Dr Nicholas Guthrie

Faigen, Dr Morris

Gillett, Dr Dennis George

Granger, Dr Michael Peter

Grasset, Dr Anthony Vincent

Hall, Dr John Vernon George

Hefernan, Dr James Lewis

Heffelfinger, Dr Robert Morris

Hill, Dr Kenneth Chase

Hodes, Dr Harold