



Dr Robert John Cowan 1917–2014

Dr Robert J. Cowan, a pioneer plastic surgeon in British Columbia, died peacefully at home on 21 April 2014.

Born in Scarborough, Ontario, and raised in Toronto, Dr Cowan graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto in 1941. The following year he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and was posted to British Columbia, where he served in the Aleutian Islands and on the west coast of Vancouver Island before being transferred to Shaughnessy Veterans' Hospital at the end of the Second World War.

With encouragement from Dr R.G. Langston, he later returned to Toronto to qualify as a plastic surgeon. After spending 3 years in Toronto and at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London, England, he passed his fellowship exams in 1949 and returned to Vancouver. In those early years he had the opportunity to operate 6 days a week, with Sunday visits to his patients, and also pursue all aspects of his specialty, from hand surgery to burns. Long before medicare, he lived "25 hours a day," trying to get the plastic and reconstructive surgery patients into a single ward, answering night calls from all across the Lower

Mainland, working 1 day a week at Shaughnessy to operate on wounded veterans, and eventually helping establish the burn unit at Vancouver General Hospital (VGH).

He was a board member at VGH, an active member of the Pacific Northwest Plastic Surgery Society, a member of the American College of Surgeons, and an elected fellow of the American Hand Society. He also served as a clinical professor at UBC from 1952 to 1986.

Before he retired, he twice volunteered for Care Medico—in Malaysia in 1967 and Afghanistan in 1970. The second tour enabled him to pursue his lifelong interest in the travels of Alexander the Great, touring most countries of the Middle East.

Once retired, he enjoyed golfing with friends and hiking. After his eyesight began to decline he continued his travels in Asia, Europe, Australia, and locally in Vancouver and the Pacific Northwest until a broken hip restricted him more to his home and garden. He enjoyed listening to audiobooks, opera, and Stuart McLean, and had books on history, exploration, geology, and many other subjects read to him. He watched movies, golf, and documentaries with the help of a narrator, and was taken for drives and walks.

Dr Cowan was predeceased by his wife, Alma, and is survived by his three daughters, four grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

—Jane Cowan, PhD
Vancouver

With the death of Dr Cowan on 21 April we lost an important contributor to local medical history. Dr Cowan joined Dr R.G. Langston in the practice of plastic surgery in 1949 and brought to the community a high level of professionalism that persist-

ed throughout his 39 years in practice. He rapidly won the respect of his colleagues for his integrity, deportment, and outstanding surgical skills. His recognition went well beyond the local community. He was elected president of the Canadian Society of Plastic Surgeons and member of the prestigious American Association of Plastic Surgeons.

I met Bob during my first year of surgical training at Shaughnessy Hospital in 1956. The next year I completed a research project under his tutelage in the animal laboratory at Vancouver General Hospital. Dr Cowan encouraged me in my desire to train in plastic surgery and recommended that I seek a position in Britain. With his support I procured a job in Edinburgh and later at the Great Ormond Street Hospital. Anne and I both enjoyed life in the UK and were very comfortable there when Bob wrote to me saying it was time to come home. We worked together at VGH, developing a first-class plastic surgery unit, burn unit, and training program.

What do I remember most about Bob? His surgical skills were remarkable, but more than that he was always a student. Before the term *lifelong learning* came into common use, he personified it. No publication related to his specialty escaped his eye. He read every article, no matter where it was published, and used this knowledge to enhance his skills to the benefit of his patients. To the residents fortunate to train with him he was an excellent role model. His care was exemplary, he was always professional with his colleagues and patients, and he taught by example the importance of continual learning. During his last year of practice at age 71, he was still enthusiastically discussing with residents the contents of

the first issue of a new journal, *Oculoplastic Surgery*. Dr Cowan touched many lives. I am fortunate that mine was one of them.

—A. Douglas Courtemanche, MD
Vancouver



**Dr William J. McLaren
1921–2014**

Dr Bill McLaren died peacefully on 20 July 2014 at 93 years of age. He was a remarkable man with immense energy and a dry sense of humor. Together, he and his wife, Pat, lived life to the fullest. They loved people and had friends everywhere. They traveled extensively and always seemed to know someone no matter where they went.

Bill was born in Poole, Dorset, England, on 30 January 1921. This was a few months after his parents returned to Britain from Canada where his father, an academic, had spent time at McGill University. When asked where he was from, Bill liked to respond that he was conceived in Canada and born in Britain.

Dr McLaren was from a family of four. His two older brothers joined the RAF at the beginning of the Second World War and both succumbed in the Battle of Britain. Dr McLaren pursued his studies at that point and graduated from medicine from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland in 1944. He then joined

the RAF and was in the medical section until 1946. It was at this time that he met and married Pat, his soulmate and lifelong companion.

From 1946 Dr McLaren trained in general surgery in London at Guy’s Hospital with rotations at other institutions. It was while at Guy’s Hospital that he became interested in thoracic surgery and worked under a pioneer in the field, Lord Russell Brock. He received his FRCS in 1949.

In 1951 the McLarens moved to Canada, where Bill completed a 1-year residency in thoracic surgery at Vancouver General Hospital. The following year he was appointed surgical specialist to the Department of Tuberculosis Control, BC, and the family moved to the Tranquille Tuberculosis Sanatorium just west of Kamloops. When the surgery section was discontinued in 1957, Dr McLaren joined the staff of the Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops and became a partner in the Burris Clinic. He practised general surgery and thoracic surgery in Kamloops for the next 31 years until he retired in 1987.

During his years in active practice Dr McLaren held many positions in Kamloops and provincially. He was president of the medical staff and chief of surgery at Royal Inland Hospital, he was an examiner for the LMCC, he was on the executive of the BCMA Section of General Surgery for 12 years and the chair for 2 of those years, and he was on the executive of the BC Surgical Society for 10 years and president from 1987 to 1988.

Outside of medicine, Dr McLaren was on the executive—and usually president for a time—in many organizations in Kamloops, including the Kamloops Ski Club, Kamloops Figure Skating Club, Kamloops Tennis Club, Community Cancer Association, Tod Mountain Ski Club, Kamloops Rotary Club, and the Thompson Valley Film Society. He also followed local city activities and never hesitated to send

a letter to the newspaper if there was something he didn’t agree with.

Summers in the McLaren family centred around a cottage on Shuswap Lake and winters were spent skiing at Tod Mountain. Even after his beloved wife died in 2012, Bill carried on with weekly tennis matches and skiing until he was 92. Dr McLaren is survived by his three sons, each of whom has gone on to marry, and there are now a number of McLaren grandchildren.

—Gordon Olsen, MD
Kamloops



**Dr John Sanderson Smith
1936–2013**

Dr John Sanderson Smith was born in Shrewsbury, England, and died suddenly in Surrey, BC, where he had lived for the past 43 years.

I first met John in the summer of 1978. My wife, Mary, was invited to a ladies’ lunch put on to welcome us back to BC from PEI, where I’d been a missionary orthopaedic surgeon for 4 years. John was also a missionary, once removed, in Surrey Hospital when he became the second internist on staff, joining the inestimable Dr Ludwig Mirabel.

A family friendship ensued and our combined seven children subsequently grew up together. Our four

Continued on page 352

Continued from page 351

daughters, especially, became life-long friends. The girls still visit each other, no doubt detailing the successes of their children and the failings of their husbands, just as their mothers did.

John and I found ourselves thrown together through our wives. We seemed to hit it off, each of us having a dominant gardening gene. I bought a house in White Rock and wanted to clear the back of the lot to plant a large vegetable garden. Although John wore a lifelong Janus gardening face, with a strong disinclination toward growing vegetables but a passion for flowers and fruit, he and Angela mucked in with a vengeance. We have old photographs showing four welly-clad arsonists, casually tending half a dozen large bonfires. Not long after that epic conflagration, the City of White Rock brought in its killjoy no-burn bylaw.

Over the years, we wine and dined, biked and hiked, skied, shared Christmases, and even sailed together. My children came to regard John as an uncle. It was a very great sadness, therefore, when this wonderful friendship suffered its first pruning.

John remained one of nature's gentlemen, never yielding to the false gods with which medicine tempts its practitioners. A man for all seasons, John understood and appreciated the inevitable parade of the seasons all around him in his garden. And he appeared to accept the same march within himself. Some of us may rage at the dying of the light, but I never saw this in John. He grew through his 70s with a shrug and a glass or two of wine.

His gardening was studied and knowledgeable. He delighted in germinating unusual flowers from his many travels abroad, bringing seeds into the country concealed within the fluff of his trouser pockets. A large orchard survives him. At one point, I wondered if he planned on installing

a cider press in his toolshed.

Relating to alcohol, it was John who solved the misery of flying overnight to visit relatives in England. John claimed his system was based on the second law of thermodynamics, loosely defined as the more the merrier. He started with a mild hypnotic pharmaceutical, but quickly moved to products fermented or distilled. Traveling steverage during the early clinical trials, John morphed the journey into a scientific assay, carefully studying the soporific beneficences as he sashayed from juniper to grape to grain. After years of selfless experimentation, John lighted upon the precise formulation to achieve his desired objective—a safe, oral, self-administered, light general anesthetic. Sadly, he died before he could publish his findings.

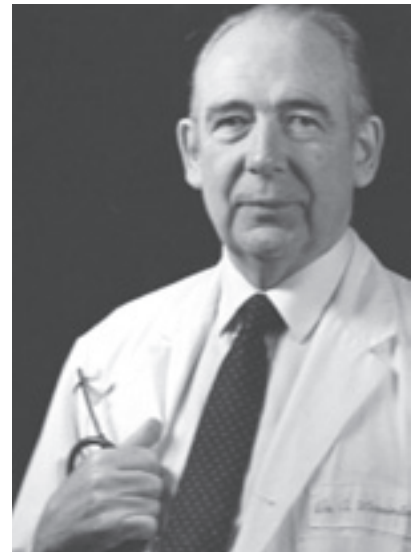
John was a great believer in pharmaceuticals and carried this chemical approach into his garden. Not for John the insecticidal soap or other wishy-washy natural product. He went straight to the systemic pesticides. He wanted the poison in the sap where it could do the most good and be sheltered from the next shower of rain. When challenged on this toxic approach, he did concede the only safe place to store his liver would be in the Canadian Shield. Rarely, he went grocery shopping, and then would carefully navigate away from the organically grown vegetables. He thought he needed as many preservatives as he could get his hands on at his age.

John loved music, theatre, opera, and movies. He read widely, and what he read, he remembered. John's general knowledge was quite remarkable; before Google, there was John Smith. Truly a living oxymoron—behind the common name lurked an uncommon man.

On the day he died, over a pre-dinner poolside G&T, John told us he was to retire. He was ambivalent about this. I reassured John that, hav-

ing quit 11 years previously, I still relished the joy of seeing Surrey Memorial Hospital in my rearview mirror for the last time. John left this life suddenly and without warning at the after-dinner table while among friends. Such a postprandial exit from life's stage is surely a consummation devoutly to be wished. That all of us should be so blessed.

—Gerard Ponsford, MBBS
White Rock



Dr Alfred Michael Warrington 1924–2014

With heavy hearts we mark the passing of our beloved father, Dr Alfred Michael Warrington, who died peacefully at home, surrounded by family, two days after his 90th birthday. Dr Warrington, known to many as Mike, is survived by his wife, Helen; his children, Richard (Tricia), Patricia (Kevin), Michael, John (Claire), Aileen (Manuel), Brian, Gail (Kirby), and Cara (David); and 14 wonderful grandchildren. Born in London, England, Dr Warrington joined the British Army in 1942, graduated from Sandhurst Military College in 1944, and was a tank commander in Montgomery's fabled Desert Rats (Seventh Armoured Division, First Royal Tank

in memoriam

Regiment). Narrowly escaping death or capture after his tank was hit by a bazooka during operation Market Garden in Holland in 1944, Dr Warrington remained with the British Army in Egypt until 1947. Returning to England after the war, Dr Warrington was accepted at the University of London Medical School and trained at the Middlesex Hospital. After graduation, Dr Warrington practised at the Canadian Red Cross Memorial Hospital in Taplow, England, where he met and fell in love with Helen Bond. They were happily married for 59 years.

With limited prospects for a young physician in England at the time, Dr Warrington answered an advertisement seeking physicians in Canada and moved with his family to Saskatchewan in 1957. After serving rural communities for 3 years, he moved to and started a medical practice in Victoria, BC. Eventually moving to Vancouver, Dr Warrington was a dedicated member of the medical community of Lions Gate Hospital for over 20 years. His passion for the military encouraged him to serve as the medical officer of the British Columbia Regiment. He then accepted command of the 12th Medical Company Reserve Unit in Vancouver and retired as commanding officer and lieutenant colonel. In honor of his long military service, Dr Warrington was chosen to be presented to Queen Elizabeth II in 2005.

Medicine was his life's work, and Dr Warrington worked as a locum well into his 70s. After he retired, he and Helen enjoyed travel and relaxing afternoons in sunny Tsawwassen.

Michael was the true patriarch of the family and a wonderful English gentleman. He will be missed enormously and never forgotten.

—John Warrington
Vancouver



J.H. MacDermot Writing Awards

The *BCMJ* invites writing submissions from student authors, and each year awards a prize of \$1000 for the best full-length print article written by a medical student, and \$250 each for the two best med student blog articles.

The *BCMJ* J.H. MacDermot Writing Awards honor Dr John Henry MacDermot, who served as editor for 34 years (1932–1968), overseeing the publication's transition from the *VMA Bulletin* to the *BCMJ* in 1959. Dr MacDermot also served as BCMA president in 1926.

For submission guidelines and contest deadlines please visit www.bcmj.org/jh-macdermot-writing-awards.

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