

Obituaries

We welcome original tributes of less than 500 words; we may edit them for clarity and length. Obituaries may be emailed to journal@doctorsofbc.ca. Include birth and death dates, full name and name deceased was best known by, key hospital and professional affiliations, relevant biographical data, and a high-resolution head-and-shoulders photo.



Dr Alexander Letham Black
1946–2021

With deep sadness, we announce the passing of Dr Alex Black. Alex made the unforeseen decision to end his life. Though his choice is difficult to understand, we ask you to think of him with compassion and respect.

Alex graduated from Glasgow University in 1970 and practised as a GP in Scotland for 10 years before moving to Vanderhoof, BC, in 1981. He faithfully served as a family practitioner in that community for 28 years and dedicated himself to meeting the health care needs of all those he served. Alex was a mentor to a generation of doctors who passed through Vanderhoof and was a role model for many who continue to serve in rural medicine in BC.

In 1997, recognizing the demands placed on physicians in rural communities, Alex was instrumental in the development of the Northern Rural Doctors Group. This group of initially 22 physicians challenged the health authority and Ministry of Health to solve the longstanding difficulties faced by rural and remote communities and physicians with recruitment and retention. He was an unwavering leader, and after 6 months of hardship, an agreement was reached that resulted in on-call pay and improved working conditions. This later led to MOCAP and the formation of the Joint Standing Committee

on Rural Issues. Rural medicine's needs were placed firmly on the map thanks to Alex's vision and determination.

Alex went on to serve on the then BCMA Board, where he ably represented his northern constituents and was proud to be from Vanderhoof, "the geographic centre of BC." He was forthright and pragmatic, having the ability to guide debate to a timely and wise conclusion.

Alex was awarded the Doctors of BC Silver Medal of Service in 2009.

Alex found solace at his cabin on Fraser Lake, where he enjoyed fishing, outdoor curling, and an occasional good Scotch. He entertained his friends and family with a dry sense of humor and always had a twinkle in his eye. Time spent with Alex was time well spent.

While we will never know the reasons behind his last decision, we must rejoice in his life and remember the good times. He will be sadly missed but never forgotten by all who knew this dedicated physician.

Alex joins his parents, Francis and Agnes; his first wife, May; his brothers, John and Bobby; and his brother-in-law, Will F. He is survived by his wife, Petra; his son, David; his daughter-in-law, Donna; his grandson, Ryan; his sisters, Nan and Christine; Christine's husband, Will; and his sister-in-law, Ann. He also leaves behind many nieces, nephews, extended family, and friends in Scotland, Austria, and Canada.

We encourage you to look out for each other and remind everyone that the Physician Health Program of the Doctors of BC provides supportive counseling and interventional services to physicians and their families in times of need. You can contact the program at 604 398-4300.

—Alan Gow, MBChB

Osoyoos

—Bill Cavers, MD
Victoria



Dr Heather Fay
1948–2020

Heather peacefully passed away in her home in Vancouver on 4 November 2020 after having struggled with an aggressive form of ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) for the past 2 years. Beauty, grace, and intelligence are words that come to mind when you think of Heather, and the dignity and kindness with which she lived will long survive her. Helping others, especially the downtrodden or animals in distress, was her passion.

After graduating in medicine from the University of Aberdeen in 1973 and doing some postgraduate training there, she practised medicine in the Middle East, learned Arabic, and delighted in bringing the Scottish egalitarian attitude to a very hierarchical system. A passionate linguist, she spoke five languages, including impeccable French, and was also able to get by in multiple other languages. Prior to a vacation she delighted in studying the local language, her feeling being that in order to understand a country or a people you had to understand the language.

While she was a medical student, she competed successfully as a downhill ski racer, became the British Universities champion, and was selected to the UK team to compete in the World Student Games. She also loved sailing,

and in 1976 she set sail from Marseille, France, to spend 2 years circumnavigating the globe in a 29-foot sailboat. Heather loved hosting events, and her renowned dinner parties gathered a diverse and fascinating group of friends. A party held by Heather was sure to be fun, often ending up at the bar with a sing-along.

Heather was a champion and pioneer of integrated medicine, which she became interested in through her own life experiences. She worked as a family physician for 25 years and in her private therapeutic practice for 2 decades, training in complementary fields including traditional Chinese medicine, clinical hypnosis, and medical acupuncture. She was a leader in clinical hypnosis in British Columbia, and with her “big brother” Dr Lee Pulos pioneered the introduction of energy psychology techniques to BC. Heather was a powerful healer who cared deeply for her patients, helping many find a way through serious health and life challenges. Her personal experience with cancer equipped her to coach and support patients going through the cancer experience and beyond, and this was one of her greatest joys.

True to her spirit, Heather viewed her diagnosis with ALS as another challenge to be faced with everything she had. Her optimism and courage during this gruelling time was inspiring, and she far surpassed her specialist predictions. Heather lived bravely and true to herself until the end of her life. Her pioneering professional work, indomitable spirit, and beliefs in integrative medicine and healing will live on in those she worked with, trained, and all of us who were lucky enough to know her.

Heather is survived by Dr Patrick Fay, her loving husband of 42 years; brother, Alan (Jill) in France; and beloved niece and nephew, Dr Julie (Ewan) and David (Louise) in the UK and Geneva respectively.

We are deeply grateful to the amazing caregivers, friends, and professionals for their extraordinary and selfless commitment to Heather’s care and well-being, which made home care possible. You know who you are, and we will never forget you.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions the wake/celebration party will happen at a later date.

—Patrick Fay, MD
Vancouver



Dr John Patrick McConkey 1945–2021

With the death of Dr Pat McConkey on 10 June 2021, Canada said goodbye to one of the shy, quiet giants of orthopaedics. He was 76.

A clinical professor at the University of British Columbia, Pat was a member of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery since 1977. He completed his MD at UBC in 1969 with an internship at McGill. He completed his residency at UBC in 1975. He spent 1 year on the “western” rotation under Drs Kennedy and Fowler. His 1976 fellowship took him to Eugene, Oregon, under Dr Slocum.

His lineage in orthopaedic surgery was three generations deep. His father, Dr A.S. McConkey, was an orthopaedic surgeon, and Pat’s son, Dr Mark McConkey, is an orthopaedic surgeon at Lions Gate Hospital in North Vancouver.

Legacies are about people, and Pat created legacies. He was a leader and an integrated team player at the Allan McGavin Sports Medicine Centre at UBC. Working with his bright and energetic colleagues, he dedicated his excellence to the optimal care of the athlete. Throughout all of this intensity he always had time to inject laughter and fun into all undertakings.

Pat pioneered and popularized the current optimal care for athletes with knee injuries. His 1986 article about a new mechanism of ski injuries, published in the *American Journal of Sports Medicine*, was a seminal accomplishment. The rest of the world took notice. Internationally, Pat gained recognition for his comprehensive understanding and treatment of the athlete’s knee. At home in Canada, Pat quietly but progressively taught us the important findings, diagnostic guides, and best management for knee injuries. From him, many hundreds have

learned the importance of careful examination while using the appropriate diagnostic tests. His understanding of the knee paved the way for our current correlation of knee pathology to the findings on MRIs.

Pat became the consultant to the Canadian Alpine Ski Team in 1981, and for many decades the best athletes in the world trusted him with their care. While he looked after many athletes and multiple teams, the skier remained his focus, and the skiing world benefited immensely from his visionary observations and treatment. When you traveled the world to orthopaedic and sports medicine meetings, you were always asked if you had worked with Dr McConkey.

Pat was forever a fighter for truth and excellence in all areas of his life. Nothing was more important to him than his family. His wife, Christie, was his partner on their voyage of 48 years together. Their three children, Mark, Bronwen, and PJ, were forever a source of pride and fulfillment.

Pat’s final 8 years, spent living with brain cancer, were very hard. With his constant caregiver, Christie, he was able to enjoy a great deal of satisfaction with his family and lifelong friends. It was Christie who allowed Pat to soldier on as he did with such dignity to the end. What a team.

A person’s life can be measured in documented accomplishments; Pat had many of these. But above all, Pat will be remembered by those he brought along with him for the ride. He shared, he laughed, he loved like few others ever will. He is dearly missed.

—Paul Wright, MD
Whistler