

# Obituaries

We welcome original tributes of less than 300 words; we may edit them for clarity and length. Obituaries may be emailed to [journal@doctorsofbc.ca](mailto: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 Chi Nan Chen 1922–2020



At 19 years of age, while attempting to escape before the Japanese army occupied Singapore during the Second World War, Dr Chi Nan Chen was shipwrecked and almost drowned after the ship he was on was bombed by Japanese planes. After being carried away by the currents and adrift in the water for 30 hours, exhausted, he spotted an island to swim to in the early morning light. He was later rescued by local inhabitants who generously gave him refuge in their homes. Chi Nan eventually returned to Singapore, survived the years of the Japanese occupation, and resumed his medical studies after the war ended.

### Recently deceased physicians

If a BC physician you knew well is recently deceased, please consider submitting an obituary. Include the deceased's dates of birth and death, full name and the name the deceased was best known by, key hospital and professional affiliations, relevant biographical data, and a high-resolution photo. Please limit your submission to a maximum of 500 words. Send the content and photo by e-mail to [journal@doctorsofbc.ca](mailto:journal@doctorsofbc.ca).

Chi Nan graduated from medicine in Singapore in 1951 and was a general practitioner there until he moved to Canada in 1975. He entered the UBC psychiatric residency program when he was 56 years old, after completing a rotating internship in Saskatchewan (which in contrast to balmy Singapore was considered to be Siberia).

By 1983, he completed his FRCP requirements and embarked on a second career as a psychiatrist at Royal Columbian Hospital. He was an essential part of a busy psychiatry department treating in-patients while sharing in the coverage of emergency psychiatry and providing in-hospital consultations. His equanimity was particularly useful in the care of patients with borderline personality disorder, and his years of experience in hospital politics was appreciated by the department members. He served in unpaid administrative posts and provided some afternoons to the New Westminster Mental Health Centre. He retired from hospital practice at age 75 but continued to provide psychiatric care in Vancouver mental health clinics until his late 80s.

He was a most congenial and kind colleague who was also able to speak Cantonese and Mandarin, which was useful as the number of Chinese-speaking immigrants surged in BC. His personal vision and efforts led to the creation (in 2005) of the chair in medical ethics at the National University of Singapore, which was named in honor of his physician father, Chen Su Lan.

In his later years, he was engaged in perfecting his writing skills while maintaining a keen interest in medical topics. Just before he turned 90, he fired off a letter to the BC Therapeutics Initiative on the harms of statins after becoming aware of a biochemical pathway impacted by statins parallel to the downstream reduction of cholesterol levels, and after consulting with colleagues in Singapore and the UK.

At the time of his death (28 September 2020), he had been happily married to his wife, Seok Im, for 67 years, with whom he brought up one son and four daughters.

—B. De Freitas, MDCM, FRCP (C)  
Coquitlam

## Dr David Nigel Harries James 1957–2020



Dr Dave James died peacefully in the ICU of Victoria General Hospital on 2 August 2020. He never regained consciousness after a tragic accident 1 week prior. He had retired a matter of months beforehand, having just completed 25 years as a general surgeon in Campbell River, and was in the process of moving to his dream retirement home on the coast of Quadra Island, a new chapter in his life about to begin.

Dave was born in Winchester, England, and spent a happy childhood as the third of six children of John and Jennifer. His education started at his maternal grandfather's school at Aysgarth, Yorkshire, then progressed to Harrow School, where he was introduced to the Queen as part of the school's 400th anniversary celebrations in 1971. His family emigrated to Vancouver in 1973 as his father, John, had joined a family practice at Oakridge, but Dave stayed behind to attend his father's alma mater, St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London (where

his mother and later sister, Angela, nursed). After qualification, he worked in house-officer and senior house-officer jobs in Winchester, Reading, Anglesey, and Lincoln, among others, before applying and being accepted to the UBC surgical residency program, which enabled him to fulfill his lifelong dream of becoming a surgeon. This also enabled him to rejoin his immediate family in BC.

Dave worked hard and played hard during his residency years but couldn't wait to branch out into the real world. After doing locums on Vancouver Island, he had the opportunity to work in South Africa, which he jumped at. There he gained valuable experience in hospitals large and small, enabling him to have the confidence of managing any surgical challenge.

While in Cape Town, he became aware of a general surgery vacancy in Campbell River. Having fallen in love with the island lifestyle during an earlier locum at Port McNeil, it was not a difficult decision to apply for the job, and

thankfully his application was successful. He started work there in 1995, built many great relationships with colleagues and patients, and became a highly respected member of the community. He traveled to the north island for surgical consultations monthly and participated in a busy call schedule at Campbell River Hospital. He was renowned for his compassion, great bedside manner, and surgical expertise. There was still time for him to participate in volunteer work in Guatemala, where he performed surgery on the disadvantaged as part of a medical team. This reminded him of his time in South Africa; he was always aware of how privileged we are in the developed world.

Dave was a gentle soul with a wicked sense of humor—from a young age he was a great practitioner of practical jokes and latterly became a master of the pun. He enjoyed entertaining family and friends at his beautiful home overlooking the Campbell River harbor, where he had his boat docked. He was extremely proud

of his English and Welsh heritage and was a great collector of antiques, books, and paintings, especially maritime themed. He also loved listening to music, gardening, and traveling to all four corners of the world. He had so many plans for his retirement, which makes his early demise especially cruel. Although he never had children of his own, he was a great family man and much loved.

Dave was predeceased by his mother, Jennifer, in 2011, but is survived by his father, John (Anne), now age 92 in White Rock; brother, Richard (Joanna) in Ladner; sister, Angela, in Vancouver; sister, Catherine (Gary) in Manitoba; sister, Jackie (John) in Revelstoke; and brother, Ed (Nicole) in Alert Bay; as well as 11 nieces and nephews, many relatives in the UK, and countless friends all over the world.

A celebration of life will be planned post-pandemic.

—Richard James, MD  
Ladner



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