

# Obituaries

We welcome original tributes of less than 700 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 Bruce Fleming**  
1951–2022

Dr Bruce Fleming passed away on 18 July 2022 surrounded by his loving wife, Elizabeth Fleming; children, Andrew, Julia, and Kate Fleming; and daughter- and sons-in-law, Stephanie Schneider, Tim Jourdain, and Ehren Salazar. With Bruce's passing, British Columbia lost a brilliant medical educator, visionary administrator, and superb emergency physician.

Bruce obtained undergraduate and medical degrees from the University of British Columbia. Following graduation he completed a 2-year internship in Napier, New Zealand, where he perfected his medical craft while caring for the underserved. As planned, Bruce returned home to his beloved Vancouver, where he specialized in both family and emergency medicine. A gifted physician and educator, Bruce became a role model for multiple generations of physicians, receiving outstanding teacher and outstanding clinical teacher awards from

fourth-year medical students and residents in emergency medicine at UBC.

As associate dean for student affairs at UBC from 1999 to 2007, Bruce spearheaded expansion of student services to all four provincial training sites. This groundbreaking work was successful because of his unique skills, which included common sense, hard work, charm, and honesty. In 2011 he became associate dean of admissions, where he directed MD undergraduate selection. In this role he brought integrity and transparency to the process of selection, elevating the priority for admission of Indigenous people. Bruce was greatly admired by his peers, and he received the Silver Anniversary Award at the recommendation of his UBC classmates for lifetime career accomplishments. In addition to his academic achievements, Bruce was a passionate ukulele picker and was talented at soccer, basketball, and water sports. He loved participating in athletic adventures with friends—it was always about elevating others and never about his own achievement.

Bruce was much more than the sum of his accomplishments—so much more. He was an extraordinary husband, father, grandfather (Cohen, Wallis, Ethan, and Lucas), and friend, whose spirit of warmth and empathy brought joy to many. Once you entered Bruce's circle you were an esteemed partner for life, and his loyalty and generosity were unparalleled. He traveled the world both for the university and for pleasure, and my trips with Bruce and his wife Liz remain among the most special moments in my life. That is what it was like to know Bruce Fleming, a man with extraordinary talent and extraordinary decency who made the world a better place.

—Bruce L. Miller, MD  
San Francisco, CA



**Dr John Harries Maxwell James**  
1928–2022

John sadly left this world on 2 October, very peacefully, after a short illness. He will be greatly mourned by his wife, Anne; sons, Richard (Jonna) and Edward (Nicole); daughters, Angela, Catherine (Gary), and Jacqueline (John); and 11 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his first wife, Jennifer, and his surgeon son, David.

He was a proud Welshman, leaving the family farm at age 17 to study medicine at St. Mary's in London at the end of the Second World War. He often recounted the story of a V-bomb landing at the end of the street when he went down for his interview in 1945. One of his teachers was Sir Alexander Fleming of penicillin fame.

After completing his national service in the Royal Air Force, John worked as a GP in New Forest, Hampshire, where he was instrumental in establishing one of the first health centres

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in the country (essentially the precursor of the primary care networks that BC health authorities are now trying to establish).

He became part of the “brain drain” in 1973 and, after successfully negotiating the LMCC, managed to join a well-established group practice in Oakridge, Vancouver, where he stayed for 20 years. He was on staff at Vancouver General Hospital and did many deliveries at the old Grace Hospital. He loved medicine, and many of his patients became friends. He worked until the age of 80 and even then was reluctant to retire! The latter years of his career were spent locuming.

John especially enjoyed his time in Port Alice and Sechelt, where he had a cabin on the seashore and a boat. He loved life and was an eternal optimist as well as being a great joke teller. He embraced life in BC to the fullest. His passions were boating; gardening; his winter getaway to Mismaloya, Mexico; and, true to his Welsh roots, music, family, and rugby.

He will be greatly missed—he was one of a kind, truly an all-rounder.

—Richard James, MD  
Delta



### Dr William George Vance Mitchell 1936–2022

It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of our father, grandfather, brother, and uncle, Dr William George Vance Mitchell.

Vance passed away peacefully on Thursday, 15 September 2022, surrounded by family.

Vance forged an 85-year-long trail of laughter, compassion, generosity, and wisdom. He will be dearly missed by his brothers, Alan (Marie) and Terry (Carol); his children, Ian (Erin), John (Sonja), and Natalie (Mike); his grandchildren, Jaime, Finley, Ben, Sean, Clovelly, and Emily (Dylan); and his great-granddaughter, Mana. He also leaves behind much-loved nieces and nephews.

Vance is reunited with his wife and favorite dance and golf partner, Christabel (Chris), and his sister, Joan, who preceded him in death. They loved him dearly and will never forget his wit, charm, grace, and tomfoolery.

Vance was born in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, on 26 September 1936. He and his family would summer in Portstewart, and he loved to share stories of his adventures there, including roller-skating, golfing, and general shenanigans. While studying medicine at Queen’s University Belfast, Vance met Chris, a nurse in training; they married in 1963. Vance worked as a surgeon in Northern Ireland before immigrating to Canada in 1970 with three children under the age of 4. Vance spent 2 years at the University of Alberta Hospital in Edmonton before moving to Kamloops, where he completed his career at Royal Inland Hospital. He made many lifelong friends throughout his medical career. Vance retired in 1998, soon after moving to Sun Peaks, where Vance and Chris enjoyed life on the mountain. Vance stayed in Sun Peaks after Chris passed away in 2015 and was well supported by friends from the mountain.

Vance was many things to many people. He was a gifted surgeon; a loving husband and devoted family man; a quiet, peaceful man; a funny, gregarious host; an avid sportsman; an impatient man; a patient man; an introvert; and an extrovert. He had a finely honed Irish sense of humor, which he passed on to his children, and loved to tell stories. Outside of the operating room, Vance enjoyed golfing and fishing (and tying flies), but his happiest times were with his family. Vance’s family is warmed by memories of card games, family gatherings at Sun Peaks, and skiing at Tod Mountain.

Tremendous heartfelt thanks go to the compassionate and exceptional nurses and doctors at

Royal Inland Hospital and Kamloops Hospice. And many thanks to his primary care aide, Rya, who provided much more than comfort to him; they shared so many laughs.

—Ian Mitchell, MD, FRCP(EM)  
Kamloops



### Dr Orest Ivan Porayko 1938–2022

Dr Orest Ivan Porayko, aka “Opey,” “Opa,” and “Uncle Chupy,” died in his home next to his wife of 60 years on 30 September 2022.

Orest was born in Vegreville, Alberta, on 3 August 1938. He grew up in an austere household, the third youngest of 8 siblings. He excelled in academia and athletics, which led him to the University of Alberta, where he studied science and played college football.

Orest worked hard to get accepted to the U of A’s medical school in 1959 and graduated with his MD in 1963. After an internship, he applied for a neurosurgical residency, and along with the grueling clinical work, he also completed his master’s degree in surgery, with a research focus on spinal cord regeneration therapies.

Along the way, he met a beautiful young nurse from Moose Jaw named Marlene. They married in 1965. Three sons would soon follow (poor Marlene had to deal with far too many Y chromosomes in the Porayko household).

Shortly after completing his residency, Orest accepted a job at Royal Columbian Hospital in

New Westminster and settled into a house in Coquitlam. He treated thousands of grateful patients, some of whom I would come across in my own medical practice decades later. They would always tell me about his kindness and attention to detail.

Orest was a man of few words, and this, along with his stocky build, often intimidated people. His gruff facade belied a gentle, generous heart and a strong sense of ironic humor. He gave all the time he had to his family and very rarely indulged himself. As his children, we remember him showing up at weekend judo tournaments with his pager on his hip, massaging our shoulders before it was our turn to fight.

Until he became ill, Orest was very active. He loved his swimming pool, doing dozens of laps after work in the spring and summer. He played pickleball for endless hours. Well into his 70s, he skied down double black diamond runs at Whistler Blackcomb and often insisted on dragging his family up the hill to ski in all sorts of horrendous weather. He was extremely physically strong, which was helpful when he and Marlene bought property on Gambier Island Sea Ranch and pitched in with farm duties. He loved taking care of the animals on the farm and taking his dogs for long walks in the forest.

Orest was the protagonist in a story that is often ascribed to urban legend but is quite true. Around the turn of the century, he was hiking with his wife near Whistler when their dog ran onto the track as a passenger train approached. Orest ran onto the track and rescued the dog, but the train then hit him with full force. In the Whistler clinic, he walked the terrified general practitioner through the steps involved in placing the surgical chest tube he needed to survive the trip south, with his large hemothorax and flail chest.

His left anterior descending coronary artery occluded when he was in his mid-70s, and he was physically never the same. It was a cruel irony that a neurosurgeon would acquire a non-surgical spinal cord disease that would progress relentlessly to paraplegia and then complete debility. He survived beyond all expectations until he was finally laid to rest.

He is survived by his wife, Marlene, and his sons, Lorne (Jennifer), Bryan (Shelly), and Richard (Tricia and Levi). He is also survived

by his two sisters, Walley and Gracie, and his brother, Leighton. We miss him.

In lieu of flowers, please make a donation to the nonprofit organization Help Ukraine Vancouver Island. Visit <https://ukrainehelpvi.ca/how-to-donate> or scan the QR code below.

—Lorne David Porayko, MD, FRCPC, CIM  
Victoria



### Dr Marcia E. Prest 1952–2022

Dr Marcia Prest, beloved by so many, tragically passed away earlier this year after an illness. She was 69 years old.

Marce was born in Victoria. She obtained her BSc from the University of Waterloo and her medical degree from Queen's University, in 1979. Her 3 years of residency at downtown Toronto hospitals included medical forays to Moosonee and Moose Factory, as well as to England to train with Dame Sherlock. Marce then moved to Ottawa for 2 years of GI residency at Ottawa General Hospital and Ottawa Civic Hospital, and subsequently 4 years in practice at the National Defence Medical Centre.

In 1988, Marce opened her practice across the street from Surrey Memorial Hospital

and was the city's first staff gastroenterologist. Marce's near constant presence was transformative for patient care in Surrey, as it meant that patients did not have to be transferred elsewhere for endoscopy, and no doubt countless lives were saved. Marce's tireless work and dedication cannot be overstated; many of us feel she was one of the hardest-working physicians we have ever met. The days were long, frequently spent working into the night, spanning 33 years, always at the service of the referring doctors and, of course, the patients.

What was truly special about Marce was this work ethic paired with kindness toward everyone she touched, whether patient, colleague, or friend. She went above and beyond for her patients, providing services for free (disability forms and the like), writing letters to advocate for them for social supports, and even treating one hepatology patient and their family every year to a hotel stay in downtown Vancouver with tickets to the Liver Ball. There are so many examples of her generosity over the years.

Marce was not just kind, but also poised, wise, and elegant. She reminded me of a blonde Audrey Hepburn. She was a beautiful force to behold in her element, whether it was standing next to the bedside of a patient and compassionately explaining their health challenges to them or seeing her with intensity in her sparkling blue eyes as she scoped an ICU patient and saved yet another life. Marce was, therefore, a popular gastroenterologist and was highly sought after in the Fraser Valley and beyond, regularly receiving referrals from across the province. She balanced her busy practice with a personal life full of varied interests—cooking classes, exercise classes, biking, skiing, French lessons, golf lessons, and gardening—and raising her two children.

Marce leaves behind her wonderful husband, David; their two children, Andrew and Samantha; her son-in-law, Brad; her two darling grandchildren, Rio and Dom; and countless friends and colleagues who loved her. She was adored by so many, and her passing is a tragic, massive loss.

I miss you so very much, Marce, and though I do not think I will ever recover from your loss, I was blessed to have you as a close friend, mentor, and work partner. As I walk through Surrey

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Memorial Hospital, I think I can still hear your footsteps going *click click click* as you raced from patient to patient in those hallways, always a smile on your face. Rest in peace, dear Marce.

—Davinder K. Sandhu, MD  
Surrey



### Dr Gordon Bruce Thompson 1925–2022

It is with deep sadness that the Department of Surgery, University of British Columbia, announces the death of Dr Gordon Thompson, who, after a short illness, passed away peacefully at Royal Jubilee Hospital on 24 September 2022 at age 97. He was surrounded in his last hours by his loving family: his wife, Sally, of 62 years of marriage; his daughters, Tracey and Meg; and three grandsons, Oliver and Ethan Spratt and Calvin Cotton.

Gordon was born in Humboldt, Saskatchewan. After medical school at McGill University in Montreal, he undertook neurosurgical training at the world-leading Montreal Neurological Institute-Hospital under the influence of Dr Wilder Penfield and Dr William Vernon Cone, his tutor and his mentor, with whom he forged a special bond. In 1960, Gordon joined the neurosurgical staff at UBC and Vancouver General Hospital under the leadership of Dr Frank Turnbull, whom he succeeded as head in 1966. Until his retirement, Gordon served as head for an amazing 24 years (1966–1990). During his tenure he established the first neurosurgical training program at UBC in 1966,

where he trained a myriad of successful duly certified neurosurgical trainees and recruited several colleagues to join and enlarge the division's expertise in functional, spinal, tumor, and neurovascular subspecialties. That legacy continues to this day.

Gordon himself excelled in complex spinal degenerative diseases and in the field of epilepsy surgery; with the help of epileptologist Dr Juhn Wada, he humbly achieved results comparable to the best world centres in the area of temporal lobe epilepsy.

Outside of the operating theatre, he served his specialty in the important roles of chief of the Royal College Neurosurgical Exam Committee for 10 years, head of the Canadian Neurosurgical Society for 2 years, and president of the Western Neurosurgical and North Pacific Neurosurgical Societies.

He was a generous and caring leader who treated his colleagues, residents, and nursing and neurorehabilitation staff with respect and support, sometimes even financial. He also loved entertaining them at joyful parties at his home.

His greatest joy, however, was his loving family: his wife, Sally; their three daughters, Tracey Thompson-Franson, Wendy Thompson (predeceased), and Meg Thompson; their husbands; and his three grandsons. On retirement, Gordon moved from Vancouver to Parksville for 18 years for the quiet community-involved life but moved to Victoria 4 years ago to be close to his immediate family.

Our dear colleague, friend, and mentor lived a long, full, productive life. A man of faith, may he rest peacefully. His legacy to us will endure, and he will be missed by all who knew him.

—Felix Durity, MD  
Vancouver

## Recently deceased physicians

### July–October 2022

The following Doctors of BC members died between July and October 2022. Thank you to their families for sharing this information with the Membership Department. If you knew any of the deceased who have not yet had an obituary published in the *BCMJ*, please consider submitting a piece to [journal@doctorsofbc.ca](mailto:journal@doctorsofbc.ca).

**Dr Richard Lawrence Cone**  
8 March 1953–15 July 2022

**Dr Kiri Joan Margaret Simms**  
24 April 1958–3 August 2022  
Obituary: [www.mccallgardens.com/obituaries/kiri-joan-margaret-simm](http://www.mccallgardens.com/obituaries/kiri-joan-margaret-simm)

**Dr James Brodie Cupples**  
1 October 1955–12 August 2022

**Dr Lindsay Diana Rawling**  
10 May 1979–2 September 2022

**Dr Robin Pearce Lowry**  
23 April 1947–4 September 2022  
Obituary: [www.tributearchive.com/obituaries/25832052/robin-pearce-lowry](http://www.tributearchive.com/obituaries/25832052/robin-pearce-lowry)

**Dr Gerald John Simkus**  
1 August 1956–30 September 2022  
Obituary: <https://vancouver.sunandprovince.remembering.ca/obituary/dr-gerald-simkus-1086519642>

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