



Harman Gilbert Smith

10 October 1915 – 27 January 2006

Harman Smith was the last of the group of New Zealanders who went to the UK shortly after WW2 to train as orthopaedic surgeons and by chance found themselves working in London at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital.



Harman was born and educated in Whangarei and over the years maintained contact with the North and spent holidays in the same bay that he did as a child.

He qualified in Dunedin in 1940 and from 1941 to 1944 worked as a house surgeon and registrar at Auckland and Greenlane Hospitals carrying out a wide variety of operations as a registrar, as a number of the senior staff were in the Forces.

At an early stage he was drawn to orthopaedics and never lost his enthusiasm for the specialty.

He then served as a surgeon in the Navy in the Pacific for 20 months and was in Japanese waters when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in August 1945.

From 1947 to 1950 was spent in the UK, initially as an anatomy demonstrator at the Middlesex Hospital (obtaining the FRCS in 1948) and then at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital.

Returning to New Zealand he was obliged to work as casualty officer at Auckland Hospital for a time and was then appointed full-time orthopaedic surgeon at Middlemore Hospital, a post that he held for 4 years. He established new patient clinics and also the clubfoot clinic—clinics simply taken for granted today but established not without opposition.

He then moved to a part-time hospital appointment and to private practice where he soon developed a large consulting and medicolegal practice.

Harman was a senior surgeon at Middlemore during the era when the Orthopaedic Department was one of the largest units in the Southern Hemisphere.

He played a major role in the evolution of the specialty by influencing the growth of the training scheme and by strongly supporting academic development in the discipline. Young University staff gratefully received his help.

He seldom missed a journal club or audit session. In particular, he was an excellent role model for trainees by emphasising and demonstrating a caring attitude, and placing the needs of the patient above all else.

A hidden strength was his skill in dealing with competency issues long before this was a fashionable activity.

Harman was a quiet but strong influence on several generations of his colleagues.

He became FRACS in 1959 and later served a full term on the Court of Examiners for the final fellowship examination.

He was active in the affairs of the New Zealand Orthopaedic Association during its formative years serving as Secretary, Editorial Secretary, and President in 1974 and 1975, a role that he carried out with distinction.

During his presidency he visited every centre in New Zealand with an orthopaedic surgeon.

His Presidential address *The Distribution of Orthopaedic Manpower in New Zealand and Suggestions for Improvement* was a thoughtful and thorough presentation that greatly assisted in the development of the New Zealand Orthopaedic Training Programme.

At the conclusion of his term he and Jill presented the President's Wife's Brooch to the Association and it continues in use today.

Internationally, he was a Fellow of the British Orthopaedic Association and a Corresponding Member of the Association of Bone and Joint Surgeons and of the American Fracture Association.

He continued his association with the Navy in the RNZVR, retiring with the rank of Surgeon Commander in 1996 and his services recognised by a VRD and an OBE in 1967.

He served as Honorary Surgeon and ADC to two Governors General—Lord Cobham and Sir Bernard Fergusson.

Daughters Susan Lusk and Philippa Williams survive him.

This obituary was provided by Ross Nicholson and Harley Gray (orthopaedic surgeons and past presidents of the New Zealand Orthopaedic Association).