



## George David Abbott

Paediatrician (15 Aug 1939—10 Aug 2006)

Associate Professor George Abbott, who died after a short illness with lung cancer, was recognised on both sides of the Tasman as one of the most respected paediatricians of his generation.



George was born in Lahore and moved with his family to Christchurch after the partition of India. He graduated in medicine from the University of Otago in 1964 and gained MRACP in 1968 (FRACP in 1973). He completed his MD in 1971 on “Bacteruria in the Newborn”.

Urinary tract infections and vesico-ureteric reflux remained major research interests over many years, and with the late Ross Bailey and others he contributed to knowledge of the familial nature of this condition and the prevention of long-term consequences.

George continued his training in microbiology and infectious diseases at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, and then at Boston Children’s Hospital. On returning to Christchurch in 1973, he was appointed as Senior Lecturer in the new Christchurch School of Medicine and, together with Professor Fred Shannon, developed the undergraduate teaching programme in Paediatrics. He became an Associate Professor in 1981.

George Abbott was an outstanding clinician, teacher, researcher, and advocate for child health. His reputation was such that George was always the paediatrician other paediatricians took their children to when they were sick. He was a general paediatrician but with many sub-specialist interests. He ran the Paediatric Oncology Service for 20 years and established specialist clinics, often bringing in an Adult Medicine colleague, in areas such as urology, endocrinology, rheumatology, and inflammatory bowel disease.

His knowledge was encyclopaedic. He served for 15 years (much longer than the usual term) on the RACP written examination committee. Rumour has it the committee had an “Abbott” test for new questions. If George knew the answer, then the question might be of some use; if he did not know, then the question was discarded as too obscure.

George also enjoyed teaching and he excelled at it. Many undergraduates and young doctors responded to his exacting standards and were inspired by him to take up careers in Paediatrics and often to follow an academic pathway. The student body in Christchurch recognised his contributions by awarding him their Best Consultant Teacher prize on three occasions and the Medical School awarded him their Gold Medal for teaching excellence in 2003.

George held many administrative roles in Christchurch and was Chairman of Paediatric Services from 1985–92 and Clinical Director from 1999–2006. He did not always enjoy this role but he was a good administrator and a very effective advocate for improved child health services. His development of an Acute Assessment Unit significantly reduced hospital admissions and he strongly supported the introduction of outreach services.

As a measure of the esteem in which he was held by his colleagues, George was elected to the two highest posts available to Paediatricians in New Zealand; President of the Paediatric Society of New Zealand (1993–97) and Chairman of the Board of Paediatrics, RACP (1995–2000). Through these positions he influenced the appointment of a Child Health Advisor in the Ministry of Health and a national review of Paediatric Tertiary Services.

He had many other RACP roles, including being Senior Paediatric Examiner (1989–95) and a member of Council (1997–00), and was awarded the John Sands Medal for outstanding service to the College and its Fellows in 2002.

George will be remembered as being strongly supportive of nursing, allied, and clerical staff, and as a clinician who worked in a truly collaborative way, asking for and valuing the opinions of all staff involved in caring for a child and their family. He was a private man but those who knew him well enjoyed his sense of humour and his ability as a mimic.

Away from work, George had a number of interests. These included a love of literature and particularly poetry. His personal landscape was the mountains and the rivers of Canterbury and he was an accomplished fly fisherman. He had a lifelong interest in many sports. He was a good cricketer and was honorary Medical Officer to Canterbury Cricket, and he enjoyed coaching junior teams which he did until just before his illness.

For all his achievements George would undoubtedly count his greatest contribution as being able to help and care for the many sick children and their families to whom he dedicated so much of his life. He will be sadly missed as a friend and colleague.

George is survived by his wife, Louise; children, Christopher, Bronwyn, Felicity, Jonathan, and Georgina; and four grandchildren.

We are grateful to Professor Brian Darlow for writing this obituary.