



## John Morrison Bird

*MBChB, FRNZCGP (20 March 1931–21 March 2009)*

Dr John Bird's career as a general practitioner spanned 47 years, most of which was spent as a sole practitioner in the Christchurch suburb of Aranui.



He was born in Greymouth. His father, Dr William Anderson Bird, practiced on the West Coast for over 40 years.

John was the second of four sons, three of whom went on to become General Practitioners.

He attended Grey Main School until he came to St Andrews College as a boarder where he excelled at science and mathematics.

On leaving school, he joined his brother at Otago Medical School where he graduated MBChB in 1954. He moved to Christchurch to become a House Officer in 1955 where he met Alison Hughes.

They were married in 1957, the same year he entered general practice in Runanga.

He spent 2 years in Runanga, where he was introduced to the challenges of practicing in a small isolated community. The stories he told of that time included one of his first patients being a mine pony that had lacerated its scalp. John perched on top of a fence to stitch the "patient" while several burly miners held the pony in place.

In 1959, he took over Dr Bert Brant's practice in Aranui where he practiced until 1991. He was a sole practitioner throughout this period, with the surgery attached to the house. This meant that the family was very much part of the practice and home life revolved around surgery hours, house calls, and providing obstetric care. While a 'sole practice' in name, it was really a partnership between John and his wife Alison, who supported him in every way.

Soon after they married, Alison knitted John 'the blue jersey' that was to accompany him throughout his years in practice. It was pulled over his pyjamas late at night on his way out to yet another house call. That blue jersey was the first thing that many of his patients saw in this world.

For many years, he shared his on call responsibilities with Dr Colin Reece (every second night and every second weekend) before a wider roster developed in the eastern suburbs. John often spoke of the importance of house calls to general practice—he was always acutely aware of the role of the general practitioner in the community.

He was equally committed to providing on-the-job experience for medical students thinking of a career in general practice. John would go out of his way to make this a

valuable experience and I know that his efforts were appreciated by the students. We have decided that the donations of friends and family and a portion of the estate will go to a prize for Otago Medical School students specializing in general practice.

He was never too busy to make time for anyone in genuine need and was never truly off duty. Our holidays were punctuated with John being called to stitch wounds, treat sunstroke, and reset dislocations. For those who could not make ends meet, the subject of fees was never raised—his philosophy was that the health outcome was more important than personal gain and many benefited from his generosity over the years.

He became a Member of the Royal College of General Practitioners in 1975 and took real pride in being accepted as a Fellow in 1988. John retired from full time practice in 1991, but still took on locum work until 2004. This allowed him to remain actively involved in general practice which was his passion.

John retired from practice in 2004, the same year that Alison died. He made three trips to China to visit his son Nathan, continued his love of gardening, and rediscovered his joy of painting. He was devoted to his grandchildren and was active right up to his death. He had accompanied his granddaughter to Dunedin to show her his old university “haunts” only 1 month before he died.

John epitomized the dedication and compassion so necessary for general practice. His quiet and unassuming manner belied the contribution he made to the medical community at large and the support he gave to so many patients and families through difficult times. His love and commitment to medicine as a vocation was only matched by his love and pride in his family—we will remember him as a gentle man and a true gentleman.

John died peacefully in Christchurch after a short illness. He is predeceased by Alison and is survived by his three children Michael, Jenny, and Nathan and their families as well as his three brothers Bill, Barry, and Chris and their families.

Michael Bird, John’s eldest son, wrote this obituary with help from Jenny and Nathan.