

John Francis Bryant Uther OA



John Francis Bryant Uther (JBU) was born in Cobar on 29 June 1939, having been delivered by his father, the town's doctor. He attended high school at Scots College in Bellevue Hill, Sydney. One of his achievements there was to learn to play the bagpipes, and he became the Australian National Junior Bagpipes Champion. Although influenced by his engineer uncle, JBU decided to study Medicine at the University of Sydney, and graduated BSc(Med) in 1960, MB BS in 1963 and MD in 1971. He completed his FRACP 2 years later. He tutored at St Paul's and Women's Colleges while he was doing his BSc in medicine. In 1970 he undertook an overseas fellowship, studying regulation of blood pressure under the supervision of Professor Arthur Guyton at the University of Mississippi, and ventricular function with Professor Eugene Braunwald at the University of California in San Diego. His engineering and computing interests were also exploited as he worked on innovative techniques for measuring cardiac function and processing pressure signals and cardiac electrical signals. He returned to Australia in 1972 and with others established a hypertension clinic. In 1974 he turned his interest to the mechanism of cardiac arrhythmias. He developed cardiac electrophysiology at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and also helped develop curative surgical procedures for some of the arrhythmias. JBU already had an international reputation in cardiology when, in 1979, he became the founding Head of Cardiology at Westmead Hospital, in which position he remained until 1990 when he was succeeded by David Ross. JBU continued at Westmead Hospital until his retirement in 2012.

He was a thoughtful and competent clinician, a dextrous technician, and an innovative thinker, who was a fine mentor and inspiration to so many cardiologists both nationally and

internationally. At Westmead he established principles of practice which persisted for many years. All the cardiologists learned electrophysiology, cardiac catheterisation and echocardiography. As a means of encouraging learning and education, the roster of laboratory and other work changed every 6 months. Experienced individuals were teamed with less experienced colleagues so that skills and knowledge could be shared. Everyone participated equitably in the on-call roster. Quality assurance became an integral part of clinical and procedural practice.

An essential element of Westmead Cardiology was research. JBU was mentor to a generation of young cardiologists who learned from him the basics of research methods and presentation of data. The work of researchers at the fledgling department was rewarded with national and international recognition. Four (4) of the first six Ralph Reader Prizes of the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand were won by graduate students of JBU. His philosophy was to not only build up Cardiology at Westmead, but also to share his expertise with other colleagues, and he generously gave of his time to teach the subsequent leaders of a generation of electrophysiologists in Australia and New Zealand.

One of the hallmarks of Westmead Cardiology over the years has been development of new ideas. The Westmead Hospital Cardiology Department pioneered curative treatment for the most common form of supraventricular tachycardia (AV nodal reentrant tachycardia) and elucidated the nature of the unusual accessory pathway involved in Mahaim reentrant tachycardias. JBU facilitated development of curative surgery for this arrhythmia as well. With his first Westmead research students, David Richards and Robert Dennis, JBU used novel electrophysiological techniques soon after acute myocardial infarction to detect a high risk group, thereby allowing intervention to prevent sudden death. Later research students, Lorraine Holley, Mark Cooper, Lloyd Davis and Pramesh Kovoor, also made significant contributions to arrhythmia research. JBU was one of the first to suggest using as a monitoring device a pacemaker that did not pace, and thus implanted loop recorders were developed. JBU collaborated with engineers at Teletronics Pty Ltd (Lane Cove, NSW, Australia) to develop implanted defibrillators. With Doug Baird and David Johnson (cardiothoracic surgeons) JBU also pioneered surgery for supraventricular and ventricular arrhythmias.

In 1993 he was awarded an Officer of the Order of Australia for his service to medicine, particularly in the field of cardiac electrophysiology. JBU was appointed Clinical Professor at the University of Sydney in 1990, and served as Chairman of the Division of Medicine at Westmead Hospital 1990–1998. He was Associate Dean, Western Clinical School of the University of Sydney 2001–2006, a member of the Faculty Advisory Committee, and Chair of the Clinical Schools Liaison Committee from 2003–2006. In 2004 and 2005 he was the Faculty of Medicine representative on the Sydney University Academic Board.

JBU and Dee (JBU's wife since 1968) supported everyone at Westmead. They hosted dinners and lunches at their home for

graduate students and other colleagues, and made overseas guests welcome. In the early years, JBU and Dee entertained all the nurses, clerical, technical and medical staff and their families at a Christmas party at their home. Many of these individuals gathered in 2007 to celebrate JBU's academic life at a Festschrift and dinner in his honour, with papers from the proceedings being published in "Heart, Lung and Circulation".

Besides his impressive achievements as a Cardiologist, teacher and mentor, JBU was not only an accomplished bagpipe player and marksman (he was awarded a University Blue for Shooting), but was also a sportsman. He played golf, sailed frequently (including in a Sydney to Hobart race) and made an annual pilgrimage to the Snowy Mountains to fly fish for trout.

JBU died in Sydney on 27 February 2019 after a long illness. He is remembered as a charming gentleman, a formidable academic and beloved friend, husband and father of four delightful children of whom he was proud – James, William, Anna and Penny. He was noted for his kindness, decency and wisdom, as well as for his medical work which he performed with the highest distinction. JBU was one of the outstanding cardiologists and scientists of his generation whose legacy has lived on in the current work of those he trained and mentored.

David A. Richards, David L. Ross, A. Robert Denniss