

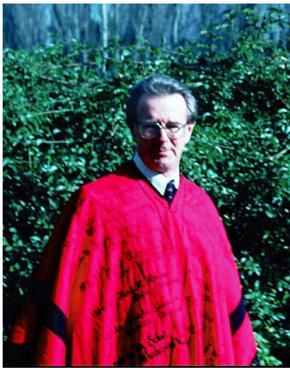
Professor Donald Simpson

18 April 1927–22 May 2018, Adelaide South Australia

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Published online: 27 February 2019

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Donald Simpson was born, lived and died in Adelaide, South Australia, close to his family home, although his influence spread far and wide throughout the world.

He was an outstanding scholar at St Peter's School and the University of Adelaide. After graduating in medicine in 1949, he spent junior years at the Adelaide Hospital before going to Oxford to study neuroanatomy, neuropathology and neurosurgery under Joe Pennybacker. During this time, he developed and published a grading system for meningiomas, which is still used today.

After neurosurgical training, he returned to Adelaide in 1956 to the Royal Adelaide Hospital where with T.A.R. (Jim) Dinning, he established the Neurosurgical Department which became a Department of Clinical Excellence, Research and Training.

He became the Director of Paediatric Neurosurgery at the Adelaide Children's Hospital in 1970, and he remained there until his retirement in 1985. He established with Plastic Surgeon, David David, the Craniofacial Unit at Royal Adelaide Hospital and the Children's Hospital. It became the top unit in the country. At a time when spina bifida was still

common, he started a Multidisciplinary Clinic at the Childrens' with Annabel Carney (Paediatrician), one of the first in Australia. Although never known as a sportsman, he supported the disabled sports and was the Medical Officer to the South Australian team.

Donald Simpson's contribution to neurosurgery in Australia in the areas of paediatrics, neurotrauma and research has been immense, President of the Neurosurgical Society of Australasia, Chairman of the Neurosurgical Board of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Committees related to road trauma, Chairman and founder of the Neurosurgical Research Foundation.

The University of Adelaide honoured him with a Doctorate in 1980, and he became a member of the Order of Australia in 1980 and an Officer in 2004 for services to medicine in neurosurgery, neurotrauma, and as a researcher and academic.

During the Vietnam War, Donald worked and taught at the Cho Ray Hospital Saigon for several months. This sparked an interest in supporting the Neurosurgeons of Vietnam organising combined meetings with The Australian Society encouraging them to form the Neurosurgical Society of Vietnam which then joined the World Federation.

He became the first President of the Indo-China Refugee Association in Australia. The present Governor of South Australia, Mr Hieu Van Le, speaks very highly of Donald's support of the Vietnamese boat people, and he attended the recent Dinner at the Neurosurgical Research Foundation to honour Donald's accomplishments. In typical Donald fashion, it was not allowed to be an honour for himself, but a fundraiser for the Foundation.

Donald Simpson became a member of the Executive of the ISPN in the early 80s and became the President in 1985/1986, the first and only Australian to do so. He was then instrumental in getting the late Tony Hockley from the UK to join the Executive. Tony told of a phone call from Donald saying they were "short of a Brit on the Executive and would he be interested?"

Tony subsequently became the President of the Society in 1998 when the first Scientific Meeting in Australia was held in

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Melbourne, and Donald was our special guest. Tony, in turn, persuaded William Harkness, until recently a Neurosurgeon at Great Ormond St in London, to join the Executive and William has just been the President of the Society. Donald was also the honoured guest at the ISPN meeting in Sydney.

Donald was highly regarded wherever he was for his great intellect, delightful turn of phrase, great honesty in the presentation of cases, non-judgmental with colleagues, a complete doctor not just a surgeon. He remained modest.

The Presidential Address at the ISPN is always special and Donald did not let Australia down. The 1986 meeting was in Madrid and he chose to speak about “An Awareness of Tragedy” using the head injury of Don Carlos son of Philip II of Spain as an example. In this speech he captures the essence of paediatric neurosurgery:

“A knowledge of development and especially of developmental neurology, is surely a more demanding requirement, and certainly it is this that sets our specialty apart from neurosurgery as a whole. More important still, however, we expect our trainees to be able to talk and to listen to children and to their parents to counsel them wisely and to be aware of the tragedies that are inherent in so much of our work - the tragedies that result from the actions of heredity, trauma and disease of the developing brain”.

“We see of cause many other tragedies: the promising child whose shunt blocks overnight, causing occipital infarction and cortical blindness, for example, or the child who survives a medulloblastoma to be a retarded dwarf. These are all

tragedies inherent in paediatric neurosurgery. We cannot accept them: we must constantly try to improve our methods of treatment, to minimise the incidence and severity of these complications”.

This presentation is worth reading in full.

In his later years, Donald took a serious interest in medical history and added to his C.V. many papers on historical subjects. His last paper was published in 2013, he was 86 years old.

To Australians, he was a role model, mentor, colleague and friend. To the end, he remained courteous, widely interested in the world around him, coping with the death of his beloved wife Joanna and minimising his increasing vascular incapacity.

I am proud to have been able to call him my friend, having enjoyed many conversations over a glass of wine in his sitting room. He has inspired many Australian neurosurgeons and has left a great legacy.

Ref: An Awareness of Tragedy.

Presidential address was given at the XIV Annual Meeting of the ISPN Madrid, 2 October 1986.

I am indebted to Professor Peter Reilly, Neurosurgeon, Adelaide, for many of the facts in this obituary.

Elizabeth Lewis

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