

Professor Gordon T McInnes

1945-2023



Cardiovascular Medicine mourns the loss of one of its most well known and loved figures, Gordon McInnes, Honorary Fellow of the British Pharmacological Society, who died suddenly on 30th May, aged 77. Gordon was a towering figure in the fields of Clinical Pharmacology and Hypertension. An imposing presence at almost precisely 2m tall, he combined his physical attributes with a sharp and competitive intellect, to pursue a highly successful career in clinical research, practice and teaching.

Gordon was born in 1945 and spent his early years in the Vale of Leven, at the southern end of Loch Lomond, just north of Glasgow. He attended Vale of Leven Academy in Alexandria and entered the University of Glasgow in 1964, an institution with which he would enjoy a life-long association. He graduated BSc, with honours in Physiology in 1969, and Medicine, MB ChB in 1971. Thereafter, he undertook postgraduate training in internal medicine in Glasgow and subsequently trained in internal medicine and clinical pharmacology in Glasgow and the Hammersmith Hospital in London. Unusually, his postgraduate training included a period of time with Searle in the USA, which perhaps helped with his subsequent career in pharmaceutical research. He was subsequently appointed a Lecturer in Clinical Pharmacology in the Western Infirmary, Glasgow where he remained as an Honorary Consultant, Senior Lecturer and ultimately Professor in Clinical Pharmacology until he retired in 2011. He was awarded an MD in 1984 and was a Fellow of numerous bodies including FRCP (Glasgow, Edin), FFPM, FAHA and FBPharmacoS.

In the Professorial Unit at the Western Infirmary, his primary clinical commitment was to General Internal Medicine. However, he developed an early interest in Hypertension and was a leader of the Glasgow Blood Pressure Clinic, developing treatment strategies that have been copied worldwide. In his later years he developed an interest in Stroke research and management and was one of the founding Consultants in the Western Infirmary Acute Stroke Service. These clinical areas formed the basis for his research interests which focussed mainly on the pharmacological management of hypertension and in clinical trials of antihypertensive therapy. He was a leader in many of the most influential trials in Hypertension and Stroke therapy including the HOT, LIFE, ASCOT, VALUE, SPORTIF, AMADEUS, RE-LY, ROCKET-AF, AVERROES and ARISTOTLE trials. Perhaps his most important contribution, however, was the development of the Glasgow Blood Pressure Clinic Database that provided computerised, outcome linked data on patients with more than 50 years of follow-up that has informed the management of hypertension and continues to produce novel research data long after his retirement. Gordon was also a major contributor to the undergraduate medical programme in Glasgow and led the Masters programme in Clinical Pharmacology at the University of Glasgow. This was one of the most popular and over-subscribed MSc programmes in the University, attracting large numbers of overseas students, many of whom have gone on to leadership positions in Universities worldwide. He also established a summer school in pharmaceutical medicine that for many years was essential for clinicians and scientists in the Pharmaceutical Industry.

He was widely recognised as a clinical leader and was President of the British Hypertension Society from 2007-9 and was also President of the Scottish Society of Physicians 2008-2009. He was awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the British Pharmacological Society on his retirement from clinical practice, the highest award of the Society. A contributor to several hundred scientific publications, he was the Editor of the British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology and was a member of the Editorial Boards of many other journals. He also served on many other committees and was a contributor to clinical guidelines including the BHS and European Societies of Hypertension and Cardiology, for the management of hypertension and other aspects of the management of cardiovascular disease.

This list of achievements and accolades does little justice to his unique ability: Gordon was, above all, a performer. Endearingly known as “big Gordon”, he was never happier than when on stage; delivering a lecture or, better still, participating in a clinical debate. He was in great demand as a speaker and contributed many hundreds of invited lectures. His delivery was legendary – forensic and terrifying at the same time. Questioners were often dismissed with a witty admonishment, although he received at least one threat of legal action! He was unbeatable at debates, refusing to be limited by the trial data and going to extraordinary lengths to find his opponents’ weak spots. The results were a magical audience experience. His clinical practice style was similarly impressive: adherence being enhanced by his physical presence and consultation manner.

There is no-one who met Gordon who would forget him. Everyone has an anecdote, whether about a conference performance or his after-dinner debates. His golfing exploits, in particular, were a source of numerous stories, and perhaps a metaphor for life. He never quite tamed the potential of his tall frame, although he never stopped trying. When the various levers and hinges aligned he could hit the ball further than anyone. To play with Gordon was to experience the full spectrum of golf shots and the A to Z of human emotion. It is difficult to think of him without a smile and it is unlikely, particularly in this age of political correctness, that we will see his like again.

Despite his clinical and research work and time spent travelling Gordon was at heart a family man. He leaves his wife, Dorothy and three children of whom he was immensely proud.

Adrian Brady, Alan Jardine and Tom MacDonald