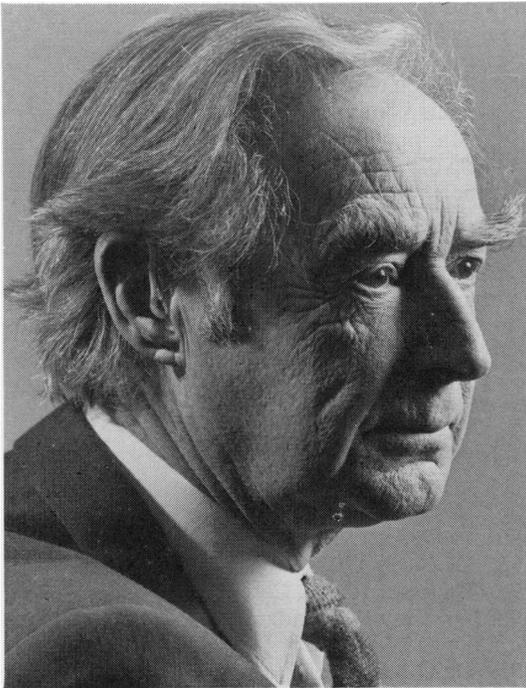


## James Spence Medallist, 1982

Dermod MacCarthy



Dermod MacCarthy was consultant paediatrician for Stoke Mandeville, Amersham, and High Wycombe Hospitals in Buckinghamshire from 1950 to 1976. He was honorary children's physician to the Institute of Child Psychology, London from 1958 to 1978. From its foundation in 1961 he has been a friend and adviser to the National Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital. He has been a pioneer in the development of facilities for children in hospital that encourage family contact and which put the child's needs paramount. His influence on younger paediatricians has been immense by his example, his writing, and his diplomatic skill as a teacher. One of his less well-known but most appreciated roles has been that of convener of meetings for the Paediatric Psychology Discussion Group with Miss Anna Freud in her Hampstead home. In his retirement Dermod MacCarthy has continued to be active on behalf of children and,

characteristically, was one of a small group of paediatricians who earlier this year met to form a Child Psychology and Psychiatry Group within the British Paediatric Association.

At the joint meeting of the Scottish Paediatric Society and the British Paediatric Association at Aviemore in Scotland in April the President, Dr G K Komrower, pointed out how unusual it was for the premier award of the British Paediatric Association to be made to someone who had not spent the productive years of his professional life in a teaching hospital or a university department: in his position as a community paediatrician in a peripheral country setting 'Dermod MacCarthy is to paediatrics what William Pickles in Aysgarth was to general practice'. He drew attention to the similarity in interest between the recipient of the medal and the one commemorated.

'James Calvert Spence was a forward looking paediatrician, a sensitive good clinician, and a staunch believer in the importance of the mother and baby attachment and the position of the child within the family, qualities and beliefs that are shared by Dermod MacCarthy whom I present to you today as this year's medallist. This award is made for outstanding contributions to the advancement and clarification of paediatric knowledge.

'Dermod grew up in a cultured, enquiring, critical, non-medical environment and this is charmingly portrayed in a talk he gave to an Oxford paediatric meeting some years ago when he described his memories of childhood. The description of his talks with his father who loved to hold long conversations while in the bath, Dermod's dislike of ladies with hair on their face who insisted on giving him a wet kiss, and more important his memory of the feeling of isolation at the time of his tonsillectomy and his early awareness that most adults had forgotten their childhood or at least had not retained any memory that would be helpful in their understanding of the problems of childhood. As a result, he determined that he would remember his childhood, later saying that to see with a child's eye is likely to help one in bringing up children, teaching, or caring for them when they are ill. He decided to become a doctor at the age of 8 years, and to emphasise this, he

dissected a pig's heart with his brother; he determined to be a paediatrician while a medical student at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London.

'After serving in the Royal Navy and then returning to Great Ormond Street and the Institute of Child Health, Dermod was appointed consultant paediatrician at Aylesbury. This was a new appointment in a small town without an established paediatric unit. He quickly set to work to create an active and clinically reliable unit with a high standard of enquiry, observation, and care, and wrote helpful papers describing his approach to some common disturbances in childhood. Like so many young paediatricians of his generation, Dermod was greatly influenced by James Spence's teaching concerning mother and child relationships and the purpose of the family. At that time Spence had recently opened the babies hospital in Newcastle where mothers accompanied their infants into hospital when sick or requiring operation, and Dermod introduced this policy into his small peripheral unit in Aylesbury. This meant that mothers were encouraged to live with their infants in the hospital and this opportunity ultimately was afforded to the parents of all children admitted to his unit. It allowed him to see the sick child in close relationship with its family and apart from facilitating diagnosis and management it helped him to identify problems of non-accidental injury and childhood deprivation. The younger members of this Association may not appreciate the prejudices and difficulties with which he had to contend, as many hospitals at that time were still restricting visiting to 1 or 2 hours two or three times in the week. He spread the mother and baby unit gospel by talking and writing and he must have been greatly encouraged by the widespread but not, I regret, universal response throughout the country.

'In the late 1960s there was considerable interest in the problem of growth because at that time the ability to measure growth hormone and other pituitary secretions became possible. In addition anthropometric measurements became much more precise. Dermod MacCarthy studied the effect of deprivation on growth, or failure of growth, in

children. Apart from accurate measurements and assessment of the emotional state of the child there were careful measurements of growth and allied hormones. The work is now well known to all of us and helped in the clarification of paediatric knowledge.

'Those of us who know Dermod well have been fortunate in enjoying his charm, his great sense of fun, and his wisdom. I thought it would be easy to write something meaningful about him but I am concerned that by being so close I might well take his wit and intelligence for granted and fail to give you a true picture of this fully rounded person. All this could not have been achieved without the love and help of his wife Marie-France whom we welcome here today. She has been a great support to him and as you will realise it is a joy to visit them in Lear House and to share their fun and cultivated conversation.

'Members of the Association it gives me great pleasure to present the Spence Medal to Dermod MacCarthy on your behalf.'

#### **James Spence Medallists**

- 1960 Professor A A Moncrieff
- 1961 Professor R A McCance
- 1963 Sir F Macfarlane Burnet
- 1964 Professor L S Penrose
- 1965 Dr Cicely D Williams
- 1967 Professor R R A Coombs
- 1968 Dr Mary D Sheridan  
Dr D W Winnicott
- 1969 Dr G S Dawes
- 1970 Professor D V Hubble
- 1971 Dr W W Payne
- 1972 Dr R C Mac Keith
- 1973 Professor C A Clarke
- 1974 Dr J Bowlby
- 1976 Dr D M T Gairdner
- 1977 Professor R S Illingworth
- 1978 Dr S D M Court
- 1979 Professor K W Cross
- 1980 Professor J M Tanner
- 1981 Dr Elsie M Widdowson