

ARCHIVES OF DISEASE IN CHILDHOOD

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JAMES SPENCE MEDALLIST 1995

Professor Richard H R White

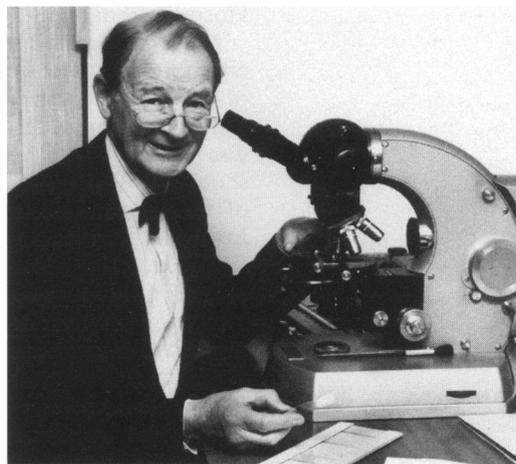
The James Spence Medal was presented to Professor Richard White on 23 March 1995. Professor Roy Meadow, President of the British Paediatric Association, gave the following citation.

The James Spence Medal is the most prestigious award of the British Paediatric Association. It commemorates Sir James Spence, Professor of Child Health at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, who was one of the founder members of our association and subsequently its President. The award is made for outstanding contributions to the advancement or clarification of paediatric knowledge.

This year's recipient is one of a generation of pioneering paediatricians, some of whom were responsible single handed for the development of children's services in our towns and cities, and others of whom founded paediatric specialties in our regional centres which often became national centres of excellence also.

Dick White is one of that latter group. After school in Newcastle under Lyme, Staffordshire, he was an undergraduate at Emmanuel College, Cambridge before progressing to Guy's Hospital Medical School in London for his clinical training.

As was usual for paediatricians of his vintage, his early training in London and the south west was in a variety of posts that enabled him to pass the adult medicine MRCP examination. Paediatric training followed mainly at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street and at Guy's Hospital. An important formative period was his senior registrarship at Great Ormond Street when he devised a new biopsy method and percutaneous needle for children requiring liver biopsy. The comparison of percutaneous and surgical biopsy techniques formed part of his MD thesis, much of which was concerned with liver histology. He was encouraged to take this interest in pathology by Professor Sir Alan Moncrieff but met some resistance from both pathologists and physicians. However, from the beginning Dick White realised that if children were to be subjected to painful and



potentially hazardous procedures then the material obtained must be treasured and dealt with in the most competent way. Throughout his career Dick has ensured that biopsy material has been subject to the most advanced investigation. He has led the field himself and has attracted funds and experts to work with him to develop particular techniques such as immunofluorescence, electron microscopy, and glomerular morphometry.

Today we salute his contribution to paediatric nephrology. When his interest in renal disease began there was no specialty of paediatric nephrology in the UK. Important work was being done in Scotland by Gavin Arneil on nephrotic syndrome, but to learn the techniques of renal biopsy Dick White relied on adult patients and the tuition of Hugh de Wardener, before proceeding to biopsy children, at first using general anaesthetic. In those days there were accidents from general anaesthetics and after experiencing such a disaster Dick developed a percutaneous renal biopsy technique which could be used with local anaesthetic. Some of this work was done during a two year secondment to Kampala, Uganda. From there he returned to Guy's Hospital where a renowned partnership developed between him and Stewart Cameron.

Together they conducted a comprehensive clinicopathological study of children with nephrotic syndrome in the two South Thames regions. That study created international interest and was one of the springboards for the development of the group led by Henry Barnett – the International Study of Kidney Disease in Children.

In 1965 Professor Douglas Hubble, the first chairman of the BPA Academic Board and a man who foresaw the need to develop paediatric specialties, invited Dick White to become senior lecturer in Birmingham. There, based at the Children's Hospital, he built a centre of excellence which became an important supraregional and national service for children with kidney problems. In the ensuing years he has ensured that appropriate child and family orientated services have developed for children requiring dialysis and transplantation; and the years of planning and persuasion by Dick and his fellow consultants culminated in the opening in 1991 of the new Birmingham Children's Hospital Renal Unit.

Many will regard his most notable research contributions to lie in the field of the pathology of glomerular disease; it is remarkable that that should be so, and that someone whose training was essentially that of a general paediatrician should subsequently have been appointed one of the four renal *pathology* assessors for the International Study of Kidney Disease in Children. In some ways he revisited the pioneering practices of those physicians in his teaching hospital at the end of the 19th century. The physicians Bright, Addison, and Hodgkin had sought and found associations between their clinical observations and their study of autopsy material. Dick White took that a stage further, using modern histological techniques. He even sought out a rather mouldy looking kidney from the Guy's Hospital museum from a patient whom Richard Bright had studied, he performed modern histopathological techniques on that kidney and was able to refine the original diagnosis made 100 years earlier. Richard Bright would have approved.

Others will recognise the importance of his work on the relationship between urinary tract infection, reflux, renal scarring, and the relevance of treatment to those conditions. But all

those who have participated with him in any research recognise his carefulness, scientific integrity, thoughtfulness, and attention to detail. It is those qualities which are the stamp of all his research, and it is those same qualities that worried families desire from their doctors when their child is ill – carefulness, integrity, thoughtfulness, and attention to detail.

Neither by nature, nor in his speaking or writing, is he a flamboyant or media seeking man, but he has achieved much for children and for paediatric nephrology using his own gifts. He is, in every sense of the word, a gentleman – courteous, fair and, when necessary, courageous and steadfast; and a gentle man – with children, with their families and with junior colleagues; unselfish and always ready to acknowledge the contributions of others to his work and achievements. He has been a great ambassador for paediatric research and medicine, and a notable teacher of paediatric nephrologists and research fellows; most of whom have gone on to develop departments or centres of paediatric nephrology not merely in this country but also Japan and Australia; and all of whom are grateful to him. Though one of those former MRC research fellows now working in Leeds, does not relish the recollection of the number of drafts, in the days before word processors, that each research publication had to go through under his guidance!

In 1986 the University of Birmingham honoured him with the title Professor of Paediatric Nephrology. Twenty two years ago he helped to found the British Association for Paediatric Nephrology and when that fledgling organisation reached maturity, he was elected their first president. There are no continents in the world, and relatively few countries in which he has not been a teacher or invited speaker, and when it has been possible for his wife, Pat, to accompany him on those trips, it has not only been Dick who has been pleased but also their many friends.

Dick White has been honoured by many institutions and associations in Britain and abroad for his services to paediatric nephrology. Today the British Paediatric Association confers upon him its highest honour. It is a very great pleasure for me to now present you, Richard Henry Reeve White, with the 1995 James Spence Medal.

James Spence Medallists

1960	Professor A A Moncrieff	1979	Professor K W Cross
1961	Professor R A McCance	1980	Professor J M Tanner
1963	Sir F Macfarlane Burnet	1981	Dr Elsie M Widdowson
1964	Professor L S Penrose	1982	Dr D MacCarthy
1965	Dr Cicely D Williams	1983	Professor J O Forfar
1967	Professor R R A Coombs	1984	Dr J W B Douglas
1968	Dr Mary Sheridan	1985	Dr N S Gordon
	Dr D W Winnicott	1986	Sir Peter Tizard
1969	Dr G S Dawes	1987	Professor J L Emery
1970	Professor D V Hubble		Dr F J Miller
1971	Dr W W Payne	1988	Professor O H Wolff
1972	Dr R C MacKeith	1989	Professor D C Morley
1973	Professor C A Clarke	1990	Professor L B Strang
1974	Dr J Bowlby	1991	Professor John A Davis
1976	Dr D M T Gairdner	1992	Professor Richard W Smithells
1977	Professor R S Illingworth	1993	Professor Dame June Lloyd
1978	Professor S D M Court	1994	Professor E O R Reynolds