

## *In memoriam*

**Prof. John I. Harper** MB BS MD FRCP FRCPC

**1950-2021**



It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Professor John Harper who passed away suddenly on Monday, 5th of April, 2021. Those who had the good fortune to know him will forever miss his sense of humour and humanity, the unmistakably gentle approach to patients and their families, and his stimulating art of linking clinical and scientific medicine.

John was born on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1950 and was brought up in Southend on Sea, Essex, a place he was proud of and always thought of as home. He studied at St. Mary's Hospital Medical School, University of London from where he graduated in 1973. He had his first taste of Paediatrics at St. Charles Hospital, London, where he was inspired by Professor David Harvey. He went on to work in Dermatology at Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, under Drs Rook, Champion and Roberts and then in Dermatology at Wycombe General Hospital, under Dr Darrell Wilkinson.

In 1980, John moved to Westminster Hospital, where he joined the Dermatology Department under Dr Peter Copeman and Dr Richard Staughton, two outstanding mentors who nurtured his passion for Dermatology. During his time at Westminster Hospital, John gained his accreditation in Dermatology in 1983 and in 1985 was awarded his MD on Graft-versus-Host Disease. In the same year, he was recipient of a BAD Research Travelling Scholarship to visit Professor Ramón Ruiz-Maldonado, Paediatric Dermatologist at the National Institute of Paediatrics, Mexico City, for several months in 1986. On his return to London in 1986, John was appointed Consultant Paediatric Dermatologist at Great Ormond Street Hospital joining Dr David Atherton. Whilst at GOSH, John made landmark contributions to the establishment and recognition of Paediatric Dermatology as a sub-specialty. John's special clinical interests were atopic eczema and the ichthyoses as examples of skin barrier abnormalities, scleroderma, vascular and cutaneous developmental anomalies, and gene therapy for severe genetic skin disorders, in particular Netherton syndrome. One of John's many legacies is the establishment in 1994 of the Laser Unit at GOSH for the treatment of children with vascular birthmarks, and the foundation of a multi-disciplinary clinic for children with complex vascular malformations which he led from 2004-2014.

John was instrumental in setting up and supporting a number of family support groups: The Ichthyosis Support Group; The Vitiligo Society; The Birthmark Support Group, the EB charity DEBRA, The Proteus Family Network UK and Sturge Weber UK.

A strong ambassador for UK Paediatric Dermatology worldwide, John's international reputation attracted fellows and trainees from all over the world, many of whom have established new departments of Paediatric Dermatology in their own countries as well as many UK fellows, who are now actively practising Paediatric Dermatology. John was invited as guest speaker to give lectures all over the world, which were highly acclaimed; he maintained special links to colleagues in Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay and Peru, as well as India, China, Japan and many European countries.

In 2001, John was awarded a personal chair and, in recognition of his contribution to Paediatric Dermatology, became the first Professor of Paediatric Dermatology in the UK at GOSH and the Institute of Child Health. He applied the rigour of his training not only to clinical cases but also to his academic work. He took a sabbatical in 2003 to pursue his interest in the genetics of eczema at the Wellcome Centre for Human Genetics in Oxford. His research contribution has been impressive with over 185 peer-reviewed publications. In 2012, with a generous donation from the Livingstone family, he established the Livingstone Skin Research Centre at the Institute of Child Health, UCL, dedicated to understanding basic cell mechanisms responsible for skin diseases in children.

In 2013, John was presented with the prestigious ILDS Certificate of Appreciation at the World Congress of Paediatric Dermatology in Madrid.

John was the founder Secretary and Chairman of the British Society for Paediatric Dermatology from 1988 to 1991 and President of the European Society of Paediatric Dermatology from 1993 to 1996. He held several administrative posts at GOSH (1999-2011), was Associate Editor of the Journal "*Pediatric Dermatology*" (1993-98) and Referee for major journals.

John also ran a successful private practice at The Portland Hospital in London for 30 years. He was the first Paediatric Dermatologist to join the Hospital and helped expand its Paediatric Dermatology Service to include a further 6 consultants, as well as establishing the Laser Service and a Birthmark Service for newborn babies.

Perhaps John's greatest legacy is *Harper's Textbook of Pediatric Dermatology*, first published in 2000 together with Arnold Oranje and Neil Prose, now in its 4th edition, published in 2020, which has become the gold standard for the specialty throughout the world. His shorter *Handbook of Paediatric Dermatology* is a must for medical students and his textbook, *Inherited Skin Disorders: The Genodermatoses*, was published in 1996, before clinics for such dermatoses became established.

Recently, John learned that he was being honoured by the European Society for Paediatric Dermatology by being awarded the first ESPD Masters Award for Lifetime Achievement in Paediatric Dermatology at the 20<sup>th</sup> ESPD Conference in Vienna, which, sadly, will now be awarded posthumously.

For those who knew John well, he remained humble and hungry for new knowledge. He was a very special person and a true gentleman. People appreciated him not only for his clinical expertise, but also for his kindness, professionalism, laughter and infectious enthusiasm; he

was generous with his time, caring of patients and their families and an inspirational mentor to many generations of Paediatric Dermatologists.

John was happily married for almost 46 years to Rowena. He was a devoted family man, immensely proud of his son, Peter, a solicitor and his daughter, Charlotte, a Paediatric Emergency Medicine Doctor. He will be dearly missed and his legacy in the field of Paediatric Dermatology will last forever.

Peter H. Hoeger and Veronica A. Kinsler