

Editorial

Obituary: Professor John Henry, MBBS, FRCP, FFAEM (1939-2007)

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John Henry was educated at St Joseph's Academy at Blackheath in London and qualified MBBS from King's College Hospital, London in 1965. He obtained the MRCP (UK) Diploma in 1974 and was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1986. He was appointed as Consultant Physician to the Poisons Unit at Guy's Hospital in 1982 and continued in that role until he became Professor of Accident and Emergency Medicine at Imperial College, London in 1997. He retired in September 2004 but continued to be active in medico-legal and media work until his untimely death on May 8, 2007.

It may not be generally known that John developed a streptococcal throat infection while on holiday in Italy in 1969. This was treated inadequately and Henoch-Schonlein purpura and kidney failure supervened. It was thought unlikely that he would be able to sustain a career in medicine on chronic dialysis and he therefore retired from active medical practice. He received a renal transplant in 1976, which was successful and he returned to medicine. Some 30 years later he required the removal of this kidney and died subsequently from a massive haemorrhage.

As a medical student John joined Opus Dei as a "numerary" member. He was Director of Netherhall House, an Opus Dei student house, between 1967 and 1970 and returned to live there during his last years. His faith enabled him to cope with his illness and with the pressures of everyday medical practice. He had a lifelong interest in football, which was in no small measure due to his father having been team doctor to Millwall Football Club.

John's enthusiasm for life and for toxicology was stimulating, even though at times he was exhausted by his illness. He had the ability to put across complicated toxicological concepts in simple language and, as a consequence, he was a very good teacher and was much in demand by the media. He worked closely with the Science Media Centre, London. He published widely on all aspects of clinical pharmacology and

toxicology and also undertook basic research into the mechanisms of toxicity, which have enhanced our understanding substantially in key areas. In recent years, John's work has emphasized the toxicity of illicit drugs - particularly MDMA (Ecstasy), cannabis and cocaine - elucidated their underlying mechanisms of toxicity and proposed how poisoning by these agents might be managed optimally. One of the last papers John published before his death was on the potential role of alpha1-acid glycoprotein in the treatment of sodium channel blockade in cocaine poisoning. It is fitting that the journal is to publish posthumously a review by John and Robert Devlin on the major consequences of illicit drug consumption.

John will be sadly missed by colleagues.

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.