
Obituaries

Geoffrey Cureton Knight, formerly Consultant Neurosurgeon in Charge, Regional Neurosurgical Centre, Brook General Hospital, London; Consultant Neurosurgeon, Royal Post-Graduate Medical School, London; Senior Lecturer in Neurosurgery, University of London

Surgeons are not made like Geoffrey Knight anymore. He was a physically large man, greatly talented, innovative, confident, commanding, reassuring and quite unable to tolerate fools in any form. Doing so gladly, would be quite out of the question. However, his commitment to his patients was total. This man of granite was always kind and caring to them, and he was always particularly concerned for the very distressed psychiatric patients he undertook to treat by means of psychosurgery. In return his patients were devoted to him. They invariably called him either Professor Knight or Sir Geoffrey, presumably because if he wasn't, he ought to have been.

He had a very special interest in psychosurgery beginning in the days of the now obsolete prefrontal leucotomy. He enthusiastically contributed to the subsequent need for developing much more refined operations for affective disorders. Then, with a quantum leap of genius, he devised his own operation of stereotactic subcaudate tractotomy (SST), first performed in 1961. This brought psychosurgery into the modern world and solved all the soluble surgical problems. Since then it has been by far the most frequently performed psychosurgical operation since the days of prefrontal leucotomy.

About 1300 SST operations have now been carried out with remarkable safety and effectiveness. Perceiving the success of the operation he set up a world unique psychosurgical unit, with beds specifically for psychosurgery, at the Brook Hospital in southeast London which was the site of the Regional Neurosurgical Centre where he was the Consultant Neurosurgeon in Charge. The Geoffrey Knight National Unit for Affective Disorders is a fitting memorial.

Between 1933 and 1938 he was consecutively the Leverhulme Research Scholar, the Mackenzie Mackinnon Research Scholar, the Bernard Baron Research Scholar and then Hunterian Professor at the Royal College of Surgeons no less than three times. After the last war he was the adviser in setting up a neurosurgical service in Czechoslovakia for which he was made an Officer of the Order of the White Lion of Czechoslovakia.

But there is no doubt, as I can testify, that he

felt very special pleasure from being made a Foundation Fellow of our College, an honour he did not at all expect. It was very satisfactory that his wide experience with psychiatric patients and his development of psychosurgery to help those with the most intractable illnesses, was recognised by the newly founded Royal College.

After his retirement, he never returned to the unit, despite invitations, saying that it was now all up to another generation. After his retirement he enjoyed many visits to Spain and its castles in his elegant Rolls-Royce, sometimes supervising repairs at tiny Spanish garages as only he could.

He died aged 87. He is survived by his wife and two sons, both of whom are doctors.

PAUL BRIDGES

Jorge Thomas, formerly Consultant Psychiatrist, Adolescent Department, Tavistock Clinic and Northgate Clinic, London

Jorge Eduardo Thomas died suddenly at work on 31 May 1994 aged 54. He suffered poor health for many years which eventually resulted in his retirement from his NHS post in 1992. But instead of this achieving the restful life his medical advisers hoped for he became busier than ever, seeing patients, supervising and teaching, both in London and abroad. It may well be that his commitment to hard work hastened his death, but all those that knew him realised that Jorge could not function any other way and that he would not have wanted it any different.

Jorge Thomas was born in Santiago, Chile on 22 November 1939 of mixed Spanish and Welsh parentage. He qualified in Medicine from the University of Chile in 1965 and spent the next eight years in Santiago developing his psychiatric expertise working with adults and children which included a special project treating Holocaust survivors who had emigrated to Chile. He came to England in 1973 where he developed an interest in adolescent psychiatry and psychoanalysis which he continued when he became senior registrar in the adolescent department of the Tavistock Clinic. While there he commenced the psychoanalytic training at the Institute of Psycho-analysis, qualifying in 1982. In 1978 he was appointed consultant to the Tavistock and Northgate Clinics thus continuing in-patient and out-patient work with adolescents. He remained in this post until 1992.

Jorge Thomas had a very enquiring mind and a profound interest in human behaviour which he