

## Obituary



**JAMES GRAHAM FRASER**  
1936–1994

Graham Fraser, Consultant Otolaryngologist at the Royal Ear Hospital, London, died on 8 February 1994, ten weeks after developing the first symptoms of advanced carcinoma. He was 57.

Graham's main achievement, pursued with characteristic effectiveness and enthusiasm during the last 12 years, was to establish Cochlear Implantation as a properly recognized and funded treatment for the profoundly deaf in the United Kingdom. He was not the only otologist to recognize the benefits of cochlear implants and to appreciate, in 1980, how far the UK had failed to grasp these benefits. It was, however, through his determination and persuasiveness that, first, an effective clinical programme for cochlear implantation was set up at University College Hospital; second, the British Cochlear Implant Group was founded, co-ordinating the work of the implant teams that were appearing across the country; and third, after unsuccessful approaches to the Department of

Health, he made direct contact with health ministers and, by a well planned and supported lobby, persuaded them that central funding for cochlear implantation was necessary.

Graham Fraser went from Westminster School to Worcester College, Oxford and Guy's Hospital Medical School. He was appointed consultant to the Royal Ear Hospital, the ENT Unit at University College Hospital, in 1971 and also held sessions at the Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital, Gray's Inn Road, between 1973 and 1984. In his post at UCH he found himself close to the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and from 1974 he was a member of its council of management. Never content to stay among the silent majority of any committee, his 20 year association with the RNID led not only to the UCH/RNID Cochlear Implant Programme but, in 1974, to the creation of the first UK fellowship for Tinnitus research, based at UCH and funded by the RNID. His

vision in stimulating and fostering research into tinnitus in his own department led eventually to the rise in national interest in tinnitus, to the setting up of tinnitus clinics, liaison with similar groups in the US and Australasia, to the foundation of the British Tinnitus Association and, over 20 years, to a change from the traditional attitude of "learn to live with it" towards more effective methods of tinnitus therapy.

The son of an engineer, Graham Fraser had a life long interest in machines and electronics. He worked with the Medical Physics Department of UCH to develop and commercially market a self-scoring machine for testing the post-auricular muscle response of babies from the Special Care Baby Unit at UCH. His microlaryngoscopes are widely used in the UK and a close escape from electrocution at the hands of a bull's eye lamp in the RNTNEH led him to develop the safe, low voltage lamp for ENT clinics. In 1982, when it became clear that a simple, inexpensive single channel cochlear implant was, for the moment, the only affordable device for the UCH/RNID Cochlear Implant Programme, he drove forward the creation of this device through his membership of the Scientific and Technical Committee of the RNID and his links with the UCH Medical Physics Department and the MRC neurological prosthesis unit.

As a surgeon Graham Fraser was principally an otologist. He published the first UK paper on labyrinthine membrane rupture; his description of the Fraser test for perilymph leaks, although not a complete answer to their diagnosis, certainly led to a wider recognition of one of the few surgically treatable causes for sensory neural deafness. Later he significantly refined and simplified the incisions and flaps used in single and multi-channel cochlear implantation.

As a manager Graham Fraser kept a high profile but this was linked to serious belief in the value of training and teaching and on a profound commitment both to the NHS and to otolaryngology, particularly as practised in his own department at UCH. In meetings he could be famously competitive and outspoken, but it was in private that his persistence and persuasiveness generally enabled him to win battles. As a chairman and team leader he combined the energy and focus that enabled things to get done, with

a genuinely democratic approach, each member of the team assured of the value of their own work. This led not only to a highly effective cochlear implant team but to a closely integrated department, with monthly meetings attended by all members of staff including the porter. In the field of cochlear implants it was largely through his influence that the UK has been left not with a number of small units doing their own thing on shoestring budgets, but properly set up multidisciplinary centres and a unique nationally co-ordinated programme with the results of implantation collated centrally through the MRC. He believed that the next step should be to develop a British multichannel device, moving forward beyond the proven benefits of existing multichannel implants and at a more economical price. To this end the UCLID programme was set up at University College London with a DHS grant and Swedish collaboration. Although he was not able to see this through he had time, while still alive, to make sure it was going forward on the firmest possible footing.

An FRCS examiner since 1989 he was appointed to the Royal College of Surgeons Examination Board in 1993 and would certainly have proved a powerful voice of common sense in planning the ENT fellowship for the next decade.

Graham Fraser's direct manner and considerable charm, while making him a popular clinician, also helped cross the boundaries that often separate surgeons from other disciplines. The College of Speech Therapists recognized him as a sympathetic collaborator; he was patron of the British Society of Hearing Therapists and, since 1986, patron of the National Association of Deafened People, a link which he greatly valued. Graham leaves a widow, Patricia, a distinguished epidemiologist, and twin daughters. He was devoted to his family and to family holidays, particularly walking. One of his great pleasures in the last weeks of his life was still to be able to get out of London into the fresh air and fields of Hertfordshire.

JOHN M. GRAHAM

The Graham Fraser Foundation, based at UCLH, has been set up with Lord Ashley of Stoke as its patron. It will promote and foster research in profound deafness.

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