

Society mourns passing of 'elder statesman'

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While voluntary organisations depend upon the energy and dedication of their members to maintain their vitality, leaders with real vision and purpose are needed to achieve new horizons. Dr R J Donaldson (better known as Paddy to his friends and colleagues), who died recently aged 85, was pre-eminent among the august band that helped fashion the unique ethos of The Royal Society for the Promotion of Health.

Professor Gerald Vinten, a former chairman of The Society said: "Paddy was a mainstay of The Society over a long period of time. He was always listened to on Council, and his counsel as 'elder statesman' was eagerly sought and highly regarded. It was a privilege to have known him, and his achievement and influence live on."

I came to know Paddy when I was Chairman of the Society's Education and Examinations Committee. His concerns over food hygiene persuaded him to write a handbook for the Society's examinations. 'Essential Food Hygiene' became a best seller and the authoritative guide for countless students. Notwithstanding his considerable academic and medical prowess, I was struck by his determination to deal as much with fundamental issues in public health as with groundbreaking research.

Just before his death, Paddy wrote his life history with his son-in-law, Dr Sammy Lee FRSH. We are grateful to Dr Lee for allowing us to publish the following extracts.

'Paddy' Donaldson hailed from Newtownhamilton in Northern Ireland. After graduating from Queen's University, Belfast in 1944, he was posted to India and then Indo-China as a newly appointed Captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps, where he saw active service.

After the War, Paddy became a Medical

Officer of Health (MOH) in the newly established NHS. The peak of his career was spent as MOH in Teesside, described as 'the golden years' in his autobiography 'Off the Cuff'. During this time he pioneered many successful new initiatives on matters as diverse as head lice and coronary care.

He was a giant in the field of public health and many in the field today, including the current Chief Medical Officer for England (Paddy's son) owe him a debt of gratitude. Paddy also served with distinction in the St John Brigade, earning a CStJ as well as an OBE in 1972 for services to medicine.

The '70s saw Paddy head south. In London he headed a special unit based in the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Now there was time to write. He had already edited a highly successful book entitled 'Parasites and Western Man'. He also co-authored 'Essential Public Health' with his son Liam: a book which has become standard reading for all aspiring consultants in public health.

The last part of his career Paddy spent as a consultant in community medicine at the Royal Free Hospital. At an age when most had retired to the potting shed, Paddy was managing a busy unit and still engaged in pioneering work. He was also running a training consortium for aspiring public health doctors at St George's Hospital.

Paddy joined The Society in 1954 and viewed the organisation as a second home. He was delighted to serve as its Chairman in the mid '70s and Honorary Treasurer in the '80s. The Society awarded him Honorary Fellowship in the early '80s and its Gold



'Paddy' Donaldson engages in lively conversation with Society President Andrew Banfield OBE and Geoffrey Brundrett FRSH at the launch of the redesigned JRS in September 2003

Medal in 1996. He always looked forward to attending the AGMs and latterly, when on rare occasions he was a little 'under the weather' a visit to some function at 'HQ' always put a spring back in his step.

On a personal level, Paddy was a bon vivant. He enjoyed life and loved his food. He was good company and unfailingly generous. He enjoyed travelling and seeing the world, both on a professional and social level. As an expert in food hygiene, he successfully avoided food poisoning!

To celebrate Paddy's distinct contribution to The Society, the organisation, in 1999, instituted the Donaldson medal. This is to be awarded only to those who have given remarkable, outstanding and unselfish service to The Society - accolades that Paddy himself exemplified. To date the medal has only been presented once; testimony not only to Paddy's uniqueness but also to how much he will be missed.

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Honorary Editor