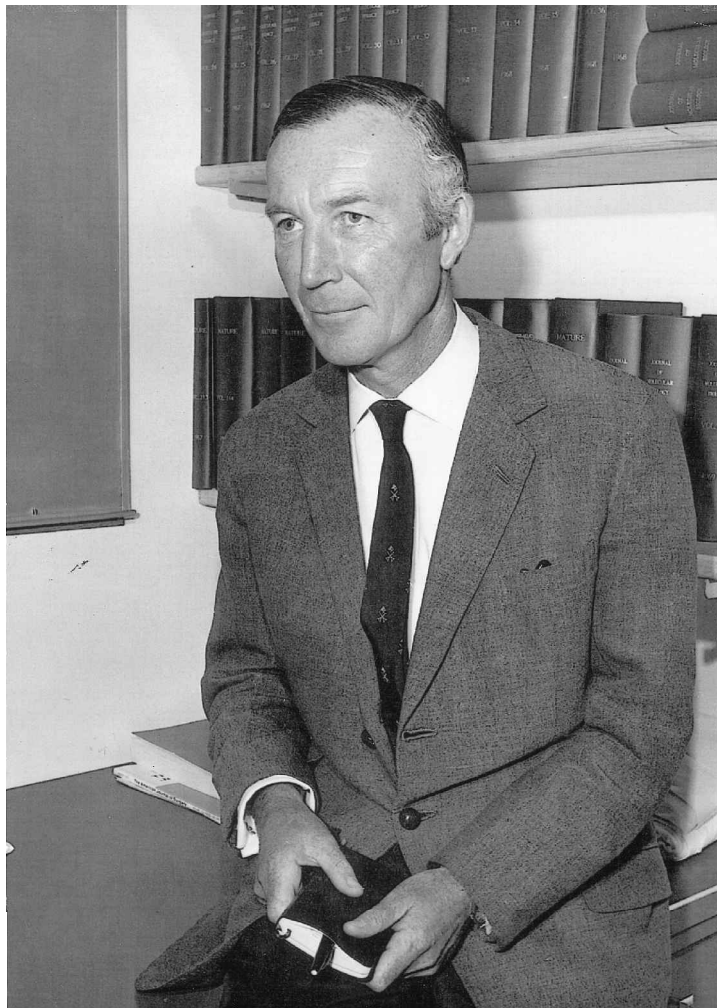


Obituary



PETER CLIFFORD

Former consultant Head and Neck surgeon Royal Marsden Hospital and King's College Hospital London (b Tralee, Co. Kerry 1921; q University College Dublin, 1945; M.B., Ch.B., M.Ch., F.R.C.S., M.D.) died from multiple sclerosis 25 November 2002.

Peter Clifford was a unique head and neck oncologist, surgeon and trialist. Working in East Africa in 1958 his innovative treatment of nasopharyngeal carcinoma (NPC) with nitrogen mustard attracted international interest. By 1965 his links with the Karolinska Institute placed him at the leading edge of research in the epidemiology of Burkitt's lymphoma (BL). After returning to the UK in 1970 Peter introduced the transcranial approach to the ethmoid for primary and recurrent tumours. His stature was further enhanced by numerous eponymous lectureships and he launched a substantial prospective randomized trial of chemo-radiation for

squamous carcinoma of the head and neck. His clinical slide collection of NPC and BL is in the Wellcome Trust photographic archive, tropical disease department.

Peter matriculated from Conglows College, Kildare and he entered University College Dublin in 1938, qualifying in 1945. His spur to study medicine was the opportunity to travel. After house jobs in Coventry and Gloucester he served in the RNVR until demobbed in 1947 and immediately applied for a ship's surgeon post with Outward Bound. Appointed to MV Calchas, during the next year, he sailed from Falmouth to North America, the

Mediterranean, Asia, Singapore and Borneo. In 1949 he was Medical Officer to a company working in Tanganyika for the Colonial Development Corporation during the building of a railway from Mtwara to Natchingwea, as part of the government's ground nut scheme. He had a "parish" the size of France and was so fascinated by the medical problems encountered that he realized he needed to specialize.

After passing the DLO in 1951 he was ENT registrar in Newcastle for three years. Following an approach to the Colonial Office in 1954 Peter was appointed assistant to Mr Fulford-Jarvis in the King George VI Hospital Nairobi, Kenya. By November of the following year he had met and married Jayne Hughes, a speech therapist on the hospital staff. He passed his MCh in Dublin in 1957 and shortly after was promoted to consultant in Nairobi. His ENT department had to handle many neurosurgical cases including trauma and in consequence he took an eight month attachment to the Radcliffe Hospital under Messrs Pennebaker and McKissock. Peter's main interest however was in patients presenting with advanced malignancy in the head and neck region, particularly NPC and BL. They were to engross his attention in the years ahead.

In 1958 Peter was using nitrogen mustard in the treatment of NPC and his use of chemotherapy for other cancers prompted a visit by a surgical team from the Sloan Kettering Institute in 1960. In 1962, 1963 and 1964 Peter read papers at the International Cancer Congress in Moscow, the Central African Medical Congress in Bulawayo and the United International Cancer Congress in Singapore respectively. He became President of the Association of Surgeons of East Africa in 1964. George Klein at the Karolinska Institute wrote to him in 1965 suggesting collaboration in clinical research on Burkitt's lymphoma. This proved very fruitful over the coming years as evidenced by the profusion of papers published and read on the aetiology, immunology and treatment. Financial support came from the Anna Fuller Fund at Yale University to whom Peter reported annually. Also in 1965, by invitation, he read a paper on "Cancer in Africa" at the first British Academic Conference in Otolaryngology and was awarded the Harrison Prize. In the next three years he read papers at meetings in Tokyo, Karachi, Mexico and Kampala. By 1969 a Radiotherapy Centre in Nairobi was established, formally opened by Jomo Kenyatta and staffed by two radiologists from the Karolinska.

At this time Peter was thinking of leaving Kenya and, reviewing his many international contacts, considered posts in Melbourne, Cape Town, Houston and London. He was elected Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1970 and resigned his post in Nairobi. This year brought further change, first an honorary MD from the Karolinska for his collaborative work with George Klein, then a three month Associate Professorship in the MD Anderson in Houston Texas. In 1971 Peter, Jayne and family

were back in UK at the Roundhouse, Cowden, Kent. Later that year Peter was appointed to the Royal Marsden Hospital as Head and Neck Surgeon and two years later he took sessions at King's College Hospital. In 1974 he delivered the James Yearsley lecture at the Royal Society of Medicine and initiated the South of England Co-operative Oncology Group (SECOG) trial. The conception of SECOG flowed from the innovative practice of combining simultaneous chemotherapy with radiotherapy and this evolved from Peter's close collaboration with Vera Dalley at the Marsden and King's. It was a RCT of treatment in patients with stage III and IV squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck, it recruited over 550 patients with stage III and IV squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck region and proved to be a major collaboration with Desmond O'Connor and Joan Durden-Smith his other radiotherapy colleagues.

In 1975 Peter was invited to the Institute of Laryngology and Otology by Professor Donald Harrison to advise on a patient with recurrent carcinoma of the ethmoid. He recommended transcranial ethmoidectomy (an operation he introduced to the UK from America in 1971) and undertook the operation at the Institute with his own anaesthetist, assistant and theatre sister. In 1976 he received the Catherine Judd award and in 1978 he was London University's Semon Lecturer. Around this time Peter represented the UK at the inaugural meeting of the College of Surgeons of West Africa in Ghana at the invitation of the British Council and later visited Burma to assess the standard of teaching of medical students in Rangoon and Mandalay at the request of the World Health Organisation.

In 1980 Peter suffered a severe head injury in a road traffic accident and, despite returning to work, the sequelae forced early retirement and a move from the country to a flat in Chelsea. Peter and Jayne also bought a flat in Cape Town in 1985 and have since enjoyed many winters there. Peter's great contribution to medicine has been his anticipation of the value of chemotherapy linked to radiotherapy in the care of patients suffering advanced squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck region nearly three decades before cumulative evidence in the literature is proving the case and at a time when many of his peers derided the very idea. To many engaged in research on Burkitt's lymphoma Peter Clifford will always be remembered as the great unsung hero identifying the viral links in the aetiology of this malignant tumour endemic in parts of East Africa. He was author of nearly 90 papers on many areas of head and neck oncology but particularly Burkitt's lymphoma and nasopharyngeal carcinoma. His autobiography "The Life of a Travelling Surgeon" was started in Cape Town in 1998 and completed a year later. It fuelled this account of a remarkable life.

Peter Clifford is survived by his wife Jayne, four children and eight grandchildren.

HENRY GRANT, JAYNE CLIFFORD