

In memory of Professor John David Williams



Professor JOHN DAVID WILLIAMS
(1931-2005)

It is with great sadness that we report the passing, late on 11 July 2005, of Professor David Williams. For a quarter century David was one of best-known figures in antimicrobial chemotherapy, at the heart of every major international conference in the field, and providing encouragement and opportunities for many young microbiologists and infectious diseases physicians from around the world.

David Williams was born in 1931 and raised on the Isle of Man, a small and semi-autonomous island half way between England and Ireland, famous for its 1000-year-old parliament, tail-less cats and for hosting, each year, a particularly dangerous motor-cycle race. He left this exotic backwater to work first as a laboratory technician in mainland Britain but was encouraged to train as a doctor. Graduating from the University of Liverpool Medical School in 1956, he held posts in Liverpool, the Royal Army Medical Corps and North London, before becoming Consultant Medical Microbiologist at the Dudley Road Hospital in Birmingham in 1965. In 1965 he gained his MD (a higher degree in the UK, not the primary medical degree), for research on urinary tract infection.

In 1974 David Williams became Consultant Medical Microbiologist and Goldsmiths Professor of Medical Microbiology at the University of London's London Hospital Medical College where he remained until his "retirement" in 1996. At "the London" he converted a tiny academic department into a major UK microbiology centre with its own research and teaching laboratories. These he filled by a growing body of medical and scientific trainees, many of them recruited internationally. In the early days things often worked on a wing and prayer. Starting at the London as a PhD student and research assistant in 1980, I found myself expected to master a technique one week and

teach it to a visiting mainland Chinese professor the next. If you learnt to work like this, and adopted a 'can-do' attitude, you prospered with "Prof", as he always was called by his staff. Not everything was so informal though and, in 1981, he established an MSc course in Clinical Microbiology, which rapidly became a standard training for medical microbiologists in Southeast England as well as attracting a growing number of overseas students, including from Taiwan. On the wider field David Williams was a founder and later President of the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy and was the first Editor (1975-1981) of its *Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy*. For many years he was a leading figure in the International Society for Chemotherapy and the Federation of European Societies of Chemotherapy, serving as president of each of these organisations at different times. In these roles he was instrumental in establishing the Western Pacific Congress of Chemotherapy and, shortly before retirement, the European Congress of Chemotherapy. An abiding memory is seeing him on the stage at the opening ceremony of the first European Congress of Chemotherapy in Glasgow, half deafened by the welcoming bagpiper playing directly behind!

Retirement was a relative term, and, rather than cultivating his garden, David Williams moved to an office in London's former Docklands serving both the International Society for Chemotherapy and the Federation of European Societies of Chemotherapy. This was soon staffed by several semi-retired ex-colleagues, including his secretary, Barbara. From here he continued to develop and co-ordinate microbiology meetings and became editor of the *International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents*, whose standing he did much to raise. He worked actively in these roles until his health deteriorated earlier this year.

Many people benefited from David Williams' great energy and international activities but those of us who worked with him for long periods at the London Hospital Medical College will remember him most of all for his generosity of spirit. He ran a very liberal and friendly department, based on trust, not diktat, where junior staff were encouraged to develop their research and to become established in their own right. He was not a micro-manager, nor one of those Heads of Department who insist that their name goes on to every publication their

staff author. Nevertheless, he was author or co-author of over 200 papers and 12 books. These things are much to his credit and Prof will be remembered with respect and affection by all who benefited. We extend our sympathy to his family.

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The staff at the Journal of Microbiology, Immunology and Infection (J Microbiol Immunol Infect) are very saddened at the loss of Professor John David Williams, who has been an international advisory board member of our journal since 2002. Professor Williams' contributions to the review of research and in advising our journal were very important to achieving the objectives of all of the societies that came together to establish the J Microbiol Immunol Infect.