



Professor Sir Neil J. Douglas (1949-2020)

Class of 1967

Neil was born in Edinburgh, the second of four children. His father, Professor Sir Donald Douglas, became President of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and his mother Di was a superb full-time homemaker. He was brought up in Dundee and educated at Dundee High School and Glenalmond College. This was followed by preclinical medicine at St Andrews University and clinical studies in Edinburgh. He graduated with distinctions in medicine, surgery and therapeutics.

He became a specialist in respiratory and sleep medicine and built an international reputation both personally and for the Department of Sleep Medicine in Edinburgh. He was also heavily involved in teaching and training as President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and founding Chairman of the UK Faculty of Medical Leadership and Management.

Training as a respiratory physician, Neil became interested in sleep apnoea, a previously under-recognised condition in which patients have interruption of their breathing patterns during sleep.

Through research in Edinburgh and Denver, Colorado, Neil investigated the causes and consequences of the syndrome, its diagnosis and its management using Continuous Positive Airways Pressure (CPAP). It has proven highly cost-effective and is now used all over the world. Modified versions of CPAP machines have been used in the treatment of respiratory failure as a result of Covid-19.

Neil was an excellent doctor who gave patients the time and care they demanded. He was modest, approachable and gave praise where it was due, and in the many tributes to him “integrity” was the most frequently used word. A man of enormous energy, he was in great demand to lecture all over the world.

He received a knighthood in 2009 for services to medicine. He married his wife Sue (née Galloway) in 1977 and she is a retired GP. Together they have a son, Sandy, and a daughter, Kirsty. Sandy is a pharmaceutical physician and one of the leaders of the University of Oxford Covid-19 vaccine development team. Kirsty is a trainee in palliative care medicine, sharing her father’s emphasis upon high standards of clinical care and training.

When his busy schedule allowed, Neil loved to retreat to the retirement house which he and Sue built on the banks of Loch Tay. He also loved gardening, hill-walking and fishing. He regarded his family and his home as his greatest achievements.

Neil sadly passed away from lung cancer at the age of 71 on August 23rd 2020.

Parts of the obituary sourced from The Scotsman, 28th May 2021.