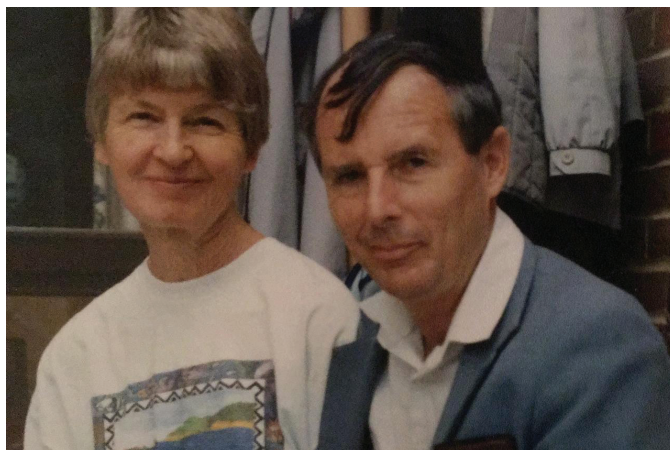


# John Gwyther Richards

12 April 1931–12 December 2018



MBChB, FRNZCGP, FRACP, FRCP(Ed)

John was born in 1931 at home in Mt Eden, to Dorothy and John Richards. His mother trained in anaesthetics, and his father was a surgeon GP, who had been decorated in the first world war. He had a younger brother, Peter. Both his parents were general practitioners, a profession which John was to follow.

After an intermediate year in Auckland, he entered medical school at the University of Otago in 1951, and graduated MBChB in 1955. He travelled to the UK to complete postgraduate studies, initially in Edinburgh, where he obtained his MRCP(Ed), and then London where he worked at the Whittington Hospital. He met his future wife Jill, who worked in the laboratory there over a series of medical specimens. Within a year they were married, and he brought his bride back to Auckland, where they raised three children.

John embraced general practice as a speciality from his early medical days. While in the UK he joined the fledgling North East London Branch of the College of General Practitioners in 1959, which was also the time that the NZ College was being established.

In 1961 he returned to New Zealand to take up partnership in a Mission Bay general practice, where he was to work for many years. Shortly after his return he was nominated as a member of the Faculty Board of the Auckland Branch of the newly

established College of General Practitioners (GPs). His association with the Board lasted many years, including terms as Secretary and Chairman.

In 1962 John also took on a part-time appointment as a visiting consultant in geriatric medicine, a position he held for the next decade. Although John had obtained Membership of the Edinburgh College of Physicians while in Britain, this qualification was not recognised by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, so in 1966 he undertook the examinations for the Australasian College. He was subsequently elected Fellow of both the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, and the Australasian College of Physicians.

When the first Dean, Cecil Lewis, arrived to set up the new Medical School at the University of Auckland in 1967, John met with him to ask for general practice education to be included in the medical students' curriculum. In 1969 he applied for and was awarded the Nuffield Travelling Fellowship in General Practice, and spent his year visiting centres in Australia, Yugoslavia, Great Britain, USA and Canada to learn about undergraduate general practice education. The following year he was appointed to the University on a part-time basis to develop the general practice curriculum. In 1973 he took up the post of Associate Professor of General Practice, within the Department

of Community Health, and began teaching the first cohort of students to reach their clinical years. His friend and colleague Rae West was later appointed as a second Associate Professor in 1978. That year John also played a role in the establishment of a Director of Postgraduate Education in General Practice (a position taken up by Dr Phil Barham), providing continuing education for GPs and other primary care practitioners. The position was funded through the generosity of the Goodfellow family, and the Goodfellow Unit has grown and flourished. It is still going strong today. In the mid 1980s general practice became its own department, which was subsequently expanded to the current Department of General Practice and Primary Health Care. After the death of his parents, John and his wife Jill donated money to the University in their honour. This was for a prize to be awarded annually, and in perpetuity, to the final year student judged to have completed the best elective in a general practice.

John lobbied hard for a Chair of General Practice. Elaine Gurr, a GP and obstetrician contemporary of John's mother, offered an endowment. She initially established an endowed Chair at the University of Otago, and subsequently a second one at University of Auckland in 1989. The first Chair was Dr Brian McAvoy from England. John resigned from the University in 1996, but remained active in many areas relating to general practice.

He was involved with the College of GPs throughout his career. He served as College's nominee on the Medical Education Committee of the New Zealand Medical Council, and was Chairman of the Examination Committee for the College. In 1979 he was made a Fellow of the New Zealand College of General Practitioners (subsequently the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners). In the 1980s the Auckland Faculty found it had surplus funds and set up a Charitable Trust to provide research funds for GPs. The

money was invested in shares, but in 1987 John proposed that instead the Trust buy real estate. Soon after the property was purchased, the sharemarket crashed. When later the house was sold, the Trust's money doubled. John was Chair of the Trust for a number of years, and through his wise investments, this resource continues today.

John always enjoyed writing. In 1975 he produced a *Charter for General Practice* for the College. In 1978 he edited a book *The General Practitioner in New Zealand*, which provided an overview to general practice education, organisation and research at that time. Next came *Primary Health Care and the Community* in 1981. His 1992 book *You and Your Doctor* aimed to give patients a better understanding of what they might expect from their GP. He had a number of peer-reviewed publications, particularly in the *New Zealand Medical Journal*, on topics such as GP knowledge, education and their relationship to other primary care practitioners.

Later in his career he became involved with the Doctors' Health Advisory Service, an organisation set up to meet a perceived need for better healthcare for medical professionals. He was an early proponent of the view that all doctors should have their own GP, and in 1997 he co-edited *In Sickness and in Health*, a handbook for doctors, other health professionals, their partners and families.

After his retirement, John's interests centred on 'Class of 55' reunions, and his profitable hobby of dabbling in real estate. John and Jill were a kind, caring and hospitable couple. Both are sadly missed.

John was truly a pioneer of academic general practice in New Zealand, and in many regards he led the way. My colleagues and I are honoured to have known and worked with him.

John is survived by his two sons David (specialist in emergency medicine) and Simon (builder), daughter Mary (university lecturer), and four grandchildren.

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#### Author information:

This obituary was written by Felicity Goodyear-Smith with assistance from John Werry and David Richards, John Richard's elder son.

#### URL:

<http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/read-the-journal/all-issues/2010-2019/2019/vol-132-no-1488-18-january-2019/7791>

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