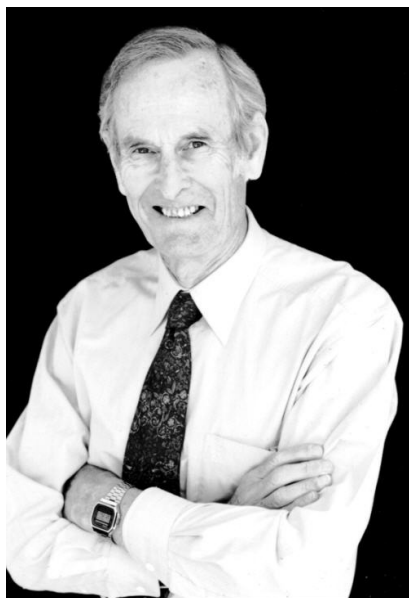


John Murray Neutze

MBChB MD, FRACP, ONZM (1934 – 2011)

A leading heart specialist, medical researcher, and teacher, Professor John Neutze trained and mentored several generations of cardiologists and paediatricians. He is remembered as a man with a common touch, sharp wit and quixotic sense of humour.



John was born in Geraldine and grew up in rural New Zealand during the 1930s Depression and Second World War years.

A humble man, he was suspicious of those who presumed authority, and in his later years set to exposing the intellectual shallowness of the ideologically-driven health reforms of the day.

His role as a health advocate was grounded in a selfless and caring personality that made him popular with patients, families and staff.

A meticulous approach to medical research, superb clinical skills, and an untiring capacity for hard work placed him at the forefront of advances in the treatment of congenital heart defects in the 1960s and 70s.

John graduated MB ChB from Otago University in 1958. He trained at Green Lane Hospital under Dr James Lowe before joining a leading fetal and infant cardiac research group in the United States. At that time most babies with severe heart defects died shortly after birth.

While in America John realised that the team in New Zealand had the ability to make a major contribution to this field. He also witnessed first-hand the problems inherent in privately funded medicine, an experience that contributed to his lifelong support for a strong public health system.

John returned to New Zealand in 1967, and with surgeon Sir Brian Barratt-Boyes and cardiac radiologist Dr Peter Brandt, further developed the world leading Cardiac Unit at Green Lane Hospital.

These were exciting times. Cardiac surgery using the heart-lung bypass machine was in its early days, and infant cardiac surgery was just around the corner. For it to become a reality babies had to be stabilised prior to surgery. John was a leading innovator and was instrumental in a number of firsts in this field.

Shortly after returning to Green Lane Hospital, he performed the first balloon septostomy in New Zealand—a life-saving procedure that involved passing a balloon from a vein in the leg across the top chambers of the heart. Using X-ray guidance, the balloon was inflated, pulled across the foramen ovale, and a larger atrial septal defect

created. This procedure heralded the advent of interventional cardiology, an area in which John was active throughout his career.

Perhaps most notably John was a central figure in the first use of prostaglandin in the world, an event that was recorded in *The Lancet* in 1975. Prior to this, there was no way of stabilising babies with duct-dependent congenital heart disease. Diagnosis was frequently made post-mortem, and in those who survived to surgery, acidosis and multiorgan failure complicated treatment, contributing to a high mortality rate. By maintaining patency of the arterial duct, prostaglandin has revolutionised the treatment of newborn babies with heart conditions. It remains in use today and has allowed countless blue babies to survive so that cardiac surgery can be undertaken with low risk.

With help from physiologists and technical staff at Green Lane Hospital, John developed a method to measure oxygen uptake, which enabled accurate assessment of systemic and pulmonary blood flow. Detailed and precise measurements of pulmonary vascular resistance, accumulated over many years, resulted in an understanding of pulmonary haemodynamics that guides operability to this day.

For several decades John and Dr Louise Calder were the only two paediatric cardiologists at Green Lane Hospital and covered the call roster 3 months about. Despite this rigorous workload, John found time to discuss cricket and politics, seeking and valuing the opinions not only of colleagues, but also of patients and families. He maintained a keen interest in music and gardening and was a proud supporter of his sons' sporting endeavours. Always leading by example, John is fondly remembered for his antique commuter bicycle, upon which he negotiated Auckland's increasingly chaotic traffic wearing a series of old suits and a trademark bow tie.

Dr John Neutze was a world expert in the care of children with rheumatic heart disease and was a member of the WHO advisory group on Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease. He was Chair of the Department of Cardiology at Green Lane Hospital for 18 years, and received an honorary professorship from the University of Auckland in 1994. His contribution to cardiology was further recognised in 2000 when he was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit.

A prolific author, his publications included 6 textbooks, 13 book chapters and over 100 medical articles. John was a strong supporter of a number of professional organisations. He served terms on Council for the Asian-Pacific Society of Cardiology, and the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand, and sat on the scientific committee of the National Heart Foundation of New Zealand. Retirement did not curtail these activities, and he was elected for a term to the Medical Council of New Zealand.

An extraordinary New Zealander who touched the lives of countless families, John Neutze set the standard to which his colleagues aspire. He is survived by Beverly (his wife of 54 years), three sons and six grandchildren.

Tom Gentles (Paediatric Cardiologist) and Green Lane Hospital cardiology colleagues wrote this obituary.