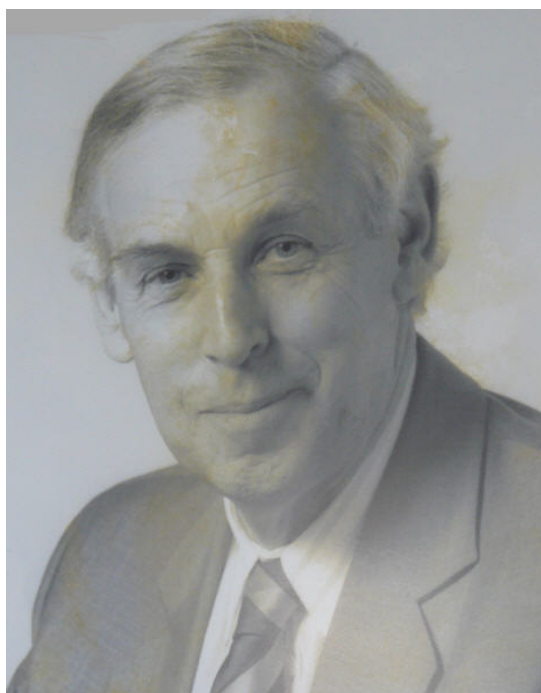


Liam Hugh Wright

December 1926 – August 2011

Mr Liam Wright was an obstetrician and gynaecologist in Auckland with a particular interest in gynaecological malignancy.



Liam was born and raised in Taranaki.

His mother Stella Hickey had been Headmistress of Opunake School and his father William John Wright had returned from the War in 1920. They married and settled on a farm purchased by Liam's grandfather in the 1870s.

Schooling commenced at the Rahotu School then Opunake School with Liam matriculating from St Patrick's College, Silverstream in 1942 at the age of 16.

Liam's older brother Ralston was with the Airforce and Liam spent the years 1943–46 working on the farm.

Liam completed his Medical Intermediate in Wellington and then went to Dunedin in 1948.

Accommodation in Dunedin then would not be contemplated by students now: a shared bedroom and facilities in a family home with another student, however Liam greatly enjoyed his time in Dunedin, completing his MB ChB and a BMed Science in Anatomy, subsequently lecturing in Anatomy. He also played rugby and was socially active, being elected President of the Otago University Students Association in 1951.

Liam met Barbara Brosnan in Wellington but it was in Dunedin, where Barbara was studying physiotherapy, that they became close and married in January 1952. Liam had a bonded Health Department grant and after two house officer years in Palmerston North, he and Barbara with two small children moved to Mangakino where Liam became the sole general practitioner.

In those years Mangakino was the centre for the Waikato Dam construction project and was very busy however Liam studied for and passed his surgical primary being one of the first to do so in New Zealand.

The path to obstetrics and gynaecology reflected his experience as a general practitioner in rural New Zealand in the 1950s where acute obstetrics could be a major challenge. Liam applied for a position as Registrar at National Womens Hospital (NWH), at that time based in an ex-army hospital in Cornwall Park, moving into a flat in the hospital grounds with Barbara and now three young children. It was here that he

met Pat Dunn with whom he worked closely for many years. Liam was also influenced and guided by Professor Harvey Carey, Chair of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

In 1959, Liam, Barbara and four children aged 6 weeks to 6 years took the *Athenic* (a passenger cargo ship) to the UK. Liam worked for a year in London, then in Oxford and finally as Senior Registrar in General Surgery in Nottinghamshire. He gained his MRCOG in 1959 (FRCOG in 1976), FRCS and FRCS(Ed) in 1961 and subsequently FRACS.

Later he and others realised that the combination of geographical separation and different approach meant that the direct links with and supervision by the RCOG was not ideal and he supported an independent college. Although he became the first president of the RNZCOG in 1982 he always believed that Australia and New Zealand should stand together and was gratified when they combined to form the RANZCOG in 1998.

The family returned to Auckland in 1962 where Liam joined the staff of NWH, became one of the founding members of the Middlemore Hospital Obstetric Unit and commenced private practice. With Pat Dunn he ran an obstetric unit at The Mater Misericordiae (now Mercy) Hospital; this service closing in the 1970s because of funding issues.

Liam also developed his interest in the management of patients with gynaecological malignancy particularly cervical cancer. During the 1970s and 80s he was involved with much of the radical pelvic surgery indicated for this disease. It was probably with some relief that Liam was able to hand on this demanding surgery to younger colleagues.

It is not surprising that Liam was required to give evidence to The Cervical Cancer Inquiry, the report being published in 1988. He had rare insight into the personalities involved and great knowledge of the clinical issues. At that time he did not have full insight into the political issues, however one of those present described him as “refreshingly honest” but then went on to describe him as “detached”. It may be that this detachment in a stressful situation was one factor in being a good surgeon. In reality with his patient (as with all others) he had great empathy and sympathy in both public and private settings.

Liam continued with his general gynaecology and obstetrics, and became the Chair of the first Medical Advisory Committee to The Auckland Hospital Board (now divided into three District Health Boards). This committee reviewed all senior appointments and advised on significant and sometimes controversial service changes—for example the transfer of general surgical services from Greenlane to North Shore Hospital. He also joined the administrative staff of The Mercy Hospital as Medical Supervisor, being Acting CEO for a period. Here, as with all his appointments, he demonstrated his ability to calm troubled waters, manage pressure without apparent stress and see the best in all others.

The clinical practice of obstetrics and gynaecology remained a source of enjoyment for Liam who undertook his last delivery at the age of 64 and his last operation at the age of 69, ages which he had selected as appropriate years previously. He continued to consult and to work on the staff at The Mercy until he retired at the age of 74.

Apart from his professional life, Liam's greatest pleasure and joy was his family and extended family. He never completely recovered from the death of his oldest son Christopher in a motorcycle accident in 1977 but his overall optimism and positive outlook remained. Liam remained closely in contact with his Taranaki origins throughout his life and was proud of his parents and his siblings and their achievements.

Liam's greatest relaxation came from his annual camping holiday which he and Barbara undertook each January at Bland Bay, a quiet Northland Beach. He did not miss a year in the last 40. In Auckland he derived great pleasure from his regular bridge and even during the last few months managed the crossword from the *Herald* and the *Guardian*.

Liam is survived by his wife Barbara, and by Peter and Mark, respectively a barrister and surgeon in Auckland, also by Virginia a documentary producer in Christchurch. He is sadly missed.

Mark Wright (a son of Liam) wrote this obituary.