

Eric Charles Parr

12 June 1925–18 October 2015

MBChB, FRCOG



Eric Parr, the first obstetric and gynaecological specialist at Middlemore Hospital, died recently at the age of 90 following a courageous battle with inclusion body myositis.

Eric was born in Dublin in 1925, into a medical family. As a small child he went to China. His father intended to become a medical missionary, but political unrest prevented this and he taught English at Peking University.

His family immigrated to New Zealand when Eric was seven. He attended King's School, was a foundation pupil of St. Peter's School, Cambridge, briefly attended Wanganui Collegiate, and completed his secondary education at Takapuna Grammar. He passed his medical intermediate in Auckland, then entered

Otago Medical School and Knox College, graduating MBChB in 1949. Following house surgeon years in Auckland, and a brief period in general practice, he sailed for England as a ship's doctor.

During 7 years' post graduate obstetric and gynaecological training in the UK (MRCOG, 1957) he worked in the Manchester Withington Hospital Group, including Boundary Park, Oldham. James Newman's hand-written reference for Eric to New Zealander, Bill Hawksworth, for a registrar position at the Radcliffe in Oxford, was brief: "Herewith Eric Parr, one of my spies—don't shoot him". He completed his training as a senior registrar at the Lewisham Hospital in London.

There were no hospital positions available on his return to New Zealand in

1960, so he commenced private practice in Papatoetoe. The following year, the new Middlemore Hospital Obstetric building was opened and Eric—soon to be joined by John Taylor and Liam Wright—were appointed as the first specialist obstetricians. Eric lived nearby in Papatoetoe, providing immediate cover of the obstetric unit for the benefit of labouring women and the education of the local general practitioner obstetricians. Caesarean section facilities were not available until 1965. Specialists generally spent a relatively short period of time at Middlemore before moving to positions in central Auckland. In the late 1960s, Ross Blue joined Eric and shared the obstetric cover. In 1980, Bill Mercer became the first full-time obstetrician and gynaecologist. Eric's commitment and dedication to Middlemore provided the foundation of the modern unit, which now has 20 specialist positions, and over 7,000 births a year. Eric declined an opportunity to join the staff of the National Women's Hospital because of the "unhappy work environment", instead playing a major role at Middlemore, where doctors and midwives enjoyed working

together. David Ansell joined Eric's practice in 1984 and Eric retired in 1990.

Eric had an eternally youthful appearance, an open engaging personality, an enthusiasm for life, and a mischievous sense of humour. He was a born conversationalist—no doubt reflecting his Irish origins. His interests were wide: his bach at Matheson Bay, sailing, skiing, photography, and music; he loved classical music and was a member of the Auckland Choral Society. He was a man without guile, artifice, ambition, or interest in medical politics. However, he did become frustrated by the 'new' hospital management system. He will be remembered by his many grateful patients, and his colleagues for his caring nature, infectious joy and enthusiasm for life.

A large number of family, friends and colleagues joined members of the Auckland Choral Society at St. Mark's, Remuera, to celebrate Eric's life and his deep Christian faith. For 51 years he was happily married to Wyn Gould, and to her and their daughters, Anna, Jenny and Elisabeth, we extend our deepest sympathy.

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www.nzma.org.nz/journal/read-the-journal/all-issues/2010-2019/2016/vol-129-no-1433-22-april-2016/6872
