

A Tribute to Dr Jean Horton (1924-2021)

Dr Jean Horton was born 28th of October 1924, in Weymouth, Dorset, U.K. Her father was a prominent surgeon and her mother a nurse from the British army. When she was nine years old, she attended boarding school, Queenswood, Hertfordshire, U.K.



Medical connections

Dr Horton's father, and grandfather had both qualified at University College, London (UCL) and although Dr Horton had received an offer to study Medicine at Cambridge University, she chose to study at UCL. Bombing during the war had destroyed many buildings in London, and so teaching at UCL had been relocated to near Leatherhead, Surrey, UK. Her grandfather used to prepare sterile surgical drapes for Lord Joseph Lister, the pioneer of aseptic technique.

Places of work

Dr Horton worked in many famous hospitals – The West London Hospital; Leicester General Hospital, Papworth and Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge (best transplant centre); East Grinstead (best centre for plastic surgery); Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London (best paediatric hospital); The Western General Hospital, Edinburgh (best neurosurgical centre outside of USA.); Lagos University Teaching Hospital, Nigeria (the first Medical School in independent Africa); as well as the Prince of Wales Hospital, Shatin.

Pioneer

During her involvement with neurosurgical and thoracic surgical patients in Cambridge, Dr Horton realised the inefficiency of ventilating post-operative patients who were randomly located around the hospital. She proposed the concentration of these patients into one centralised ward, known by the colour of the walls, as “the blue room”. This policy was incorporated in the new Addenbrookes hospital, and centralised ventilatory care now one of the bedrocks of modern Intensive Care Units.

Following her move to Edinburgh, she pioneered neuroanaesthesia with Dr Norman Dott, neurosurgeon (who was taught by Dr Harvey Cushing, the neurosurgeon who described the pituitary adenoma). She was a founding member of Neuroanaesthesia society of Great Britain and Ireland – and she was a pioneer in the widespread use of hyperosmotic solutions (hypertonic saline, then mannitol) to reduce cerebral oedema; as well as the elective ventilation of neurosurgical patients.

It was during her work with Dr Hale Enderby, at East Grinstead hospital, that Dr Horton pioneered and described the use of deliberate hypotensive techniques during anaesthesia; later in Cambridge, Dr Horton was the first to describe the use of intravenous sodium nitroprusside (SNP), which the pharmacy specially prepared for her to use.

Following her enormous experience in neuroanaesthesia in the sitting position, Dr Horton was an early proponent of the use of end tidal CO₂ monitoring for the detection of air embolism in such high risk cases (in those days, a capnograph would have cost 2/3 of my annual salary).

At the time, tuberculosis was very common in the U K, and Dr Horton was often managing thoracic cases under single lung ventilation; however she had pioneered such techniques without the availability of fibre-optic bronchoscopes; and, because ventilators were not common, these cases were often ventilated *by hand* throughout the surgery.

Dr Horton also served as Council Member Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland (AAGBI) in 1976, as well as being Honorary Secretary, AAGBI. Even during her retirement, she spoke on many occasions at the History of Anaesthesia Society. Dr Horton laid the foundations of the Department of Anaesthesia and Intensive Care, Prince of Wales Hospital (PWH), Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK); she was a Founding Fellow and Council Member of the H K College of Anaesthesiologists (Fellowship No 0008) . Dr Horton participated as an important member of the Board of Studies, which evolved into the H K C A in 1989, and constituent College of the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine in 1993.

The Arts

Outside of medicine, Dr Horton was very involved in the arts – she was Patron of Edinburgh Festival and Fringe Festival Society. She had a strong alto voice and sang with the Edinburgh Bach Society. Dr Horton also sang with the Hong Kong Bach Choir – once a signal # 10 typhoon was in place, but Dr Horton still managed to attend her audition. Dr Horton was also well travelled – she had visited the Arctic; Antarctica; the Galapagos Islands; walked the 95 mile West Highland Way in Scotland; visited the Yunnan stone forest; saw the sun set at Uluru (Ayer's Rock) Australia; She visited the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, Myanmar, and was even skiing in Sapporo, Hokkaido, Japan when she was 72 years young. Dr Horton also hiked up to the Base Camp, Mount Everest, Himalayas. In retirement, she was an active participant in the Royal Society of Medicine (History of Medicine); was elected as a member of the Board of Governors of Queenswood school, including organising the Centenary celebrations of her former school. Dr Horton also spent much time and effort researching the genealogy of her family and traced her own family history back to 1724, when her great-great-great grandfather, Mr Samuel Horton, a farmer who was born in Mowsley, Leicestershire.

The name of “Dr Jean Horton” was familiar to many UK trained anaesthetists – she was deeply involved with the AAGBI, and was well respected amongst neurosurgical anaesthetists. There were few lady anaesthetists of stature in those days, and the two names one would always hear would be Dr Aileen Adams, and Dr Jean Horton. My first opportunity to meet Dr Horton was when I visited Hong Kong, and presented my research to a meeting of the ASEAN anaesthetists in 1984. During a period of free time, Dr Horton very kindly took me for a visit to the campus of the Chinese University of HK, as well as a short visit to the PWH, Shatin. The warm hospitality shown by Dr Horton made a great impression on me, and I took up the post at C U H K.

Following Prof. Andrew Thornton's early retirement to return to the UK to look after his wife, Dr Jean Horton became Acting Chairman of the Dept of Anaesthesia and Intensive Care, PWH. Quietly and behind the scenes, Dr Jean Horton had arranged for the CUHK to make a formal invitation for Prof Teik Oh to visit Hong Kong; it was following this initiative, that he was appointed as Chair Professor of the Dept of A & I C, PWH. This was so typical of Dr Jean Horton – she would stay quiet, observing everything, and when she had made a decision, she would speak with her confident and powerful voice, and things would get done. She loved the challenge of working and living in HK and earned the respect and friendship of many Hong Kong people. Reflecting this love of HK, in 2016, Dr Horton travelled here on her own, at the

age of 92 years, to attend the World Congress of Anaesthesiology, in order to meet up with her friends and former colleagues.

Dr Horton pioneered many aspects of anaesthesia and intensive care that we all now take for granted. In spite of such a commitment to her specialty, Dr Horton still made time for her interest in the Arts. Most of all Dr Horton made time for the people around her. She would always gain the utmost respect of those who met her.

In Dr Jean Horton, not only did we encounter a great doctor, but we gained a true friend. For those of us who had the privilege of meeting Dr Horton, our lives will all have been touched by her wonderful friendship.

Dr John M Low

December 2021

Foot Note

Dr Horton passed away on the 21st October 2021, a week short of her 97th birthday. Many more interesting details are to be found in an interview with International Anaesthetist, AAGBI, as well as her fascinating autobiography "Heads for Medicine – Jean Horton" (2011) ISBN: 978-1-90517-8-49-0.

<https://anaesthetists.org/Home/Heritage-centre/Collection/Oral-Histories/Dr-Jean-Horton-International-Anaesthesia>