

SPECIAL REPORTS

Professor Gay Hawksworth – a tribute



Gabrielle M. Hawksworth (1947-2012)
Professor of Molecular Toxicology

Gay was a pharmacologist who developed an interest in toxicology. She was a pioneer in her field who cultivated links with the pharmaceutical and toxicological communities both at home and abroad. Her work on in vitro drug metabolism using a range of model cell systems was unique in its time. Gay was devoted to her work and loved to enthuse others with her love of the subject.

Gay was born in Yorkshire and always loved returning there to visit her family. She started her professional career at the University of Leeds where she achieved a joint honours BSc in Biochemistry and Bacteriology. From Leeds she moved to St Mary's Hospital Medical School in London where she worked as a research assistant under Professor REO Williams and obtained her PhD on 'Metabolic Activities of Intestinal Bacteria'. Gay then spent 6 months as a Visiting Lecturer at the Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia on a collaborative research on a project on nitrosamines and gastric cancer. From there she moved to Norway where she held a Wellcome European Fellowship at the Department of Pharmacology at the University of Bergen working on GC-MS of metabolites of flavouring compounds of plant origin. Gay then moved back to London where she spent 2 very happy years at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School in the Department of Clinical Pharmacology. It was here that Gay developed her interest and enthusiasm for toxicology and

pharmacology which she maintained throughout her life together with the life-long friends she made there.

Gay was ambitious and in 1976 she moved to a Lectureship at the University of Aberdeen where, together with Dr Harold Barber also a recent appointment in Aberdeen, she promoted pharmacology and toxicology within the Medical School on the Foresterhill campus. She was promoted rapidly through Senior Lecturer, Reader and finally, Professor of Molecular Toxicology. Never one to stand still, Gay had two sabbaticals both at the NIH in Bethesda; one in the Laboratory of Chemical Carcinogenesis at the National Cancer Institute and one in the Laboratory of Developmental Pharmacology.

Science was a great love of Gay's and she was never happier than when she was surrounded by students. Postgraduates and undergraduates alike were encouraged to think "big" and work out problems. Gay expended an enormous amount of effort in support of her students. She has supervised almost 50 research students in Aberdeen, including 31 PhD students. She brought out the best in her students and this will be part of her legacy to pharmacology and toxicology. One of Gay's early achievements was to establish, together with the late Professor Jim Petrie, the MSc in Clinical Pharmacology. This MSc continues to be successful today and attracts students from around the globe.

In addition to her day job, Gay worked tirelessly for other agencies and Societies. She was highly committed to the British Toxicology Society and served as General Secretary for 4 years and as President for 2 years and was, until recently, Special Editions Editor. She contributed for many years to a number of committees including the Medicines Commission, the Herbal Medicines Advisory Committee and was an expert member on the Advisory Committee for Pesticides (ACP). The ACP is an independent scientific committee which provides advice to Ministers and last year the UK Minister of State for the Environment announced the appointment of Professor Gay Hawksworth as the new Chair of this highly influential Committee. She contributed to the British Pharmacological Society, to IUPHAR, ISSX and IUTOX both attending and presenting at meetings and serving on committees. She was instrumental in obtaining the 2014 EUROTOX conference for Edinburgh.

Gay was generous with her time and was always interested in other people to whom she acted as a mentor, listener, colleague and friend. She loved to

travel and was a regular visitor to USA and Australia as well as the sunnier climes of Europe. In addition, Gay believed in helping others and was a member of Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI). Gay was a past president of the Aberdeen club and also regional president for North East Scotland where her interests were in helping girls and women develop their skills and talents. Bringing on the next generation of scientists was always a priority for Gay and her students always found her door open and Gay willing to challenge their results and ideas. In both her students and her published work Gay's legacy will live on.

Gay was one of the world's enthusiasts. She enjoyed all that she did and undertook everything with a positive attitude and a will to succeed. We, and the field of toxicology and pharmacology, are all diminished by her passing. She is greatly missed.

Heather M Wallace
University of Aberdeen

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