

# The Review

## Ian Greville Tait:

an appreciation



Ian Greville Tait, who died from pneumonia on 4 February 2013, was an innovator and a major influence in the renaissance of UK general practice. He practised for over 30 years in Aldeburgh, where he was Benjamin Britten's GP.

The Ipswich Vocational Training Programme, designed in the 1960s by Tait and his equally inspirational practice partner, the late John Stevens, had unique features. Based around a modern district general hospital, with support from hospital consultants, it provided both the familiar grounding in general medicine, geriatrics, paediatrics, and obstetrics and a GP training year built around whole-person medicine. The day-release learning experience included a 'sensitivity group' facilitated by a clinical psychologist designed to explore the motivations, psychological attitudes, and ethical values of the neophyte GPs. In 1972 Tait was appointed to one of the new GP Regional Adviser posts in East Anglia and the University of Cambridge, one of the first academic general practice appointments to be associated with the University. With Bernard Reiss he sparked an early scheme to introduce Cambridge medical undergraduates to GP surgeries at the beginning of their studies.

Tait believed that rigorous clinical record keeping was a key to high standards of care, and he conducted studies into problem-orientated general practice medical records, for which he was awarded his Cambridge Medical Doctorate by thesis. This research helped place the structure, maintenance, and assessment of GP record keeping on a more rigorous footing, ultimately providing a valuable platform to practices who wished to convert to electronic record keeping. He admired Lawrence Weed's similar work in the US but recognised that UK general practice needed more brevity: 'Weed with a liberal dose of paraquat', as Tait put it.

Always an advocate for Membership and Fellowship of the RCGP, he was elected to its East Anglia Faculty Board in 1965, becoming its Educational Convener, Newsletter Editor, and ultimately Provost. He was on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*. In retirement he took the undergraduate course in the History of Medicine at the Wellcome Institute while working tirelessly at the RCGP headquarters on the Heritage Committee with the late President John

Horder. His website essay on the history of the Royal College of General Practitioners is another of his many contributions to general practice.

In 1987 Tait was awarded the Royal College of General Practitioners' Baron Dr Ver Heyden de Lancey Memorial Award, for the promotion of efficiency and dignity in the realm of general medicine as a GP. A keen golfer and sailor and an accomplished painter, he was also a published Aldeburgh poet with two collections of poems entitled *River Songs* and *Wave Watch*, which have echoes of the Suffolk poet George Crabbe. His patient Benjamin Britten was a close friend and encouraged Ian Tait to publish his personal medical record to refute allegations that Britten had syphilis. The two knew that this was apocryphal, but unfortunately Ian died before he was able to adduce the evidence.

Born at Handcross, Sussex in 1926, the fourth generation in a family of doctors, Ian Tait, a Quaker, served in the Royal Navy before reading medicine at Cambridge and St Bartholomew's Hospital, where he met his wife of 60 years. After qualifying he did a year's exchange internship in New York before moving to Suffolk for the remainder of his clinical career where he remained except for 18-months work in Swaziland. He leaves his wife, Janet, four children Nicholas, Charles, Lucy, and Hugo, and nine grandchildren.

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