

Narrative research in health and illness

9–10 September, London

This 2-day conference is aimed at challenging original and explanatory research on narrative in health-related fields and will be of particular interest to general practitioners, hospital doctors, nurses, social scientists, anthropologists, linguists, creative writers, psychologists, counsellors, clinical teachers and other health professionals.

The aims of the conference are:

- To provide an opportunity for the presentation and discussion of original and exploratory research on narrative in health-related fields.
- To promote inter-disciplinary cross-fertilisation and informal collaboration in the study of narrative.
- To explore and debate the notion of rigour in narrative research and identify conceptual areas and practical arenas for future development.

The benefits of attending this conference include:

- Hearing international experts on narrative research discussing key theoretical issues.
- Contributing to the contemporary debate on the 'narrative turn' in health sciences.
- Exchanging ideas with people from a wide range of disciplines and professional backgrounds who are undertaking narrative research.
- Developing new contacts and collaborations for future work.
- Acquiring new methodological approaches for carrying out research projects.

Submissions are for either original research or workshops. There will be three sessions within the conference programme where delegates will be given the opportunity to choose to attend a workshop or a series of oral presentations. The themes for these sessions are:

- Narrative self and other
- Narrative experience and performance
- Narrative and the social world

The deadline date for receipt of abstracts is Monday 21 June 2004

For more information or to register contact Cath Lyders at:
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To register online visit:
www.bma.org.uk/narrative

appreciation - WO Williams OBE MD FRCGP

DR WO Williams of Swansea died in 2002 after a lifetime of research in general practice and his work has been both formative and influential in our discipline. This honest, humble and intellectual man was loved and respected for his contributions to the development of general practice and for his contributions to the academic credentials of the RCGP. He was called 'WO' by all who knew him. He was recognised in the 1975 New Year Honours List with the award of an OBE when he was 55 years old. A summary of his contributions prior to this award reveals some of his talent.

He qualified from the Welsh National School of Medicine in 1945. By 1950 he had entered general practice after post-graduate training and national service. This was a time when general practice was at a low ebb nationally and the brightest undergraduates were often persuaded to enter a specialty. Nevertheless WO came with BSc MBChB, and he quickly started to conduct research into measles (1954), Bornholm disease (1956), asthma (1957) and influenza (1960). His MD thesis from general practice was awarded for 'A clinical and epidemiological study of Bornholm Disease' in 1958. This involved detailed study of hundreds of cases in the Swansea epidemic of 1956; no mean achievement when general practice was over-loaded and underfunded. He was one of only three general practitioners in Wales to be awarded an MD during the 1950s.

In 1963 the Council of the College of General Practitioners established a 'Research Committee' led by such notable people as Ian Watson, Robin Pinsent and Donald Crombie. Within 2 years WO was recruited as a member of this influential group and soon he was elected Secretary to the Research Committee, a post he held for many years. At this time one of his important publications was a unique 'General practice work-load study 1965–1967'.¹

By 1973 WO had a catalogue of important work to his credit: his seminal work on Bornholm disease was published and widely quoted; work on the epidemiology of influenza in families and communities was being published and valued worldwide; his methodology for recording sudden epidemics in general practice was being adopted by a number of other countries. 'Consolidated comments' for research protocol analysis was a prototype of transparent attributable feedback by reviewers to applicants. This was used by the RCGP Research Committee for years and even audited by consumer appraisal long before audit became accepted in medical fields. He published research on 'Acute back-ache in general practice' and a systematic analysis of MDs from UK general practice had been published for the first time.²⁻⁴ This work was subsequently expanded to include many other countries. It revealed the poor pass rate and the institutional obstacles to a successful completion by GPs when compared with hospital-based disciplines with protected time. WO was appointed to the Statutory Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, an appointment that he then held for over 20 years, and he was head-hunted to be a member of the Board of the Public Health Laboratory Service, an appointment he eventually held for 6 years.

When Ian Watson, a founding father of the RCGP, needed a successor to lead the College Epidemic Observation Unit it is not surprising that he turned to WO. Under his chairmanship from 1973 onwards (and with Paul Grob soon to be appointed as secretary) the Unit flourished until it was expanded into two units, one in Swansea and another in Surrey. During the negotiations with the two universities about establishing a RCGP research unit in each, WO wrote a letter to the Chairman of the College Research Committee (Clifford Kay). In his generous and unassuming style he said: 'The question now arises whether there should be one unit in Surrey and another in Swansea ... I think it is only fair that Ian Watson should have some say in this matter because he was the pioneer of the Epidemic Observation Unit. I have the interests of the College at heart. I don't want to spoil the idea of the Unit being at Guildford ...' WO was keen to have the whole unit to Swansea, but he was a fair and generous man with the wider public interest in mind. He directed the RCGP Swansea Research Unit until 1988.

During the 1970s and 1980s WO turned his research focus onto whooping cough (in collaboration with the PHLS) and aspirin in myocardial infarction (in collaboration with the MRC) but he also found time for many other studies and to advise researchers on their work. His enthusiasm for the research process was unbounded and this earned him the title locally of 'Father of General Practice Research in Wales'. He served the College Faculty as both Chairman and Provost.

It is warming that WO received the OBE for services to medicine. This quiet but effective man has made a lasting contribution to the development of a research base in general practice and to the growth of his College. He had to retire on health grounds much earlier than he would have wanted. Tragically Alzheimers disease marred some of his final years and snatched him from the science that he loved.

Nigel C H Stott

1. Williams WO. A study of general practitioners' workload in South Wales, 1965-1966. *JR Coll Gen Pract* 1970; **19(90 Suppl)**: 1-18.
2. Williams WO. MD by thesis from general practice (1958-1967). *Br J Med Educ* 1969; **3**: 171-175.
3. Williams WO. MD by thesis from general practice (1968-1972). *JR Coll Gen Pract* 1974; **24**: 778-783.
4. Williams WO. A survey of doctorates by thesis among general practitioners in the British Isles from 1973 to 1988. *Br J Gen Pract* 1990; **40**: 491-494.