The Review

John Horder:

an appreciation

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JOHN HORDER
9 DECEMBER 1919 – 31 MAY 2012

I had the privilege of knowing John throughout my professional life. When I joined my practice as a trainee in 1977, John and his wife Elizabeth were the senior partners in 'the other practice'. The two practices shared Kentish Town Health Centre which had been built expressly to accommodate them: the upholstery in their part of the waiting room was blue, ours was red.

On winter evenings, John used to consult almost in the dark by the light of a table lamp and, as I slowly became familiar with the nature of general practice, I began to understand why and to do the same. John had realised that the key skill is listening — careful, gentle, intense listening — and that low intimate lighting made it easier for the patient to talk and the doctor to concentrate on listening. It was the first of the many lessons he taught me. And teaching by example was always his preferred method: he never instructed or insisted.

By the time I passed my exam and became a member of the Royal College of General Practitioners in 1981, John was President, a role he undertook with great dignity and poise but with no sense of his own personal importance. Throughout his career he took a strong personal interest in those who work with and for GPs and he created an annual John Horder award for an outstanding contribution by a member of the College staff. Recognising how much the different professionals working within healthcare teams could learn from each other and the extent to which this would

help them to work together effectively, he went on to found the Centre for the Advancement of Inter-professional Education (CAIPE) in 1987.

John's capacious intellect and artistic gifts meant that he could have achieved outstanding success in many different careers. He was a wonderful pianist, organist, and watercolourist but these talents had to be relegated to hobbies because of his commitment to general practice at a time when such a choice offered little but hard and often heart-breaking work, and condescension from specialist colleagues. He was an outstanding member of the generation that transformed UK general practice and we all have reason to treasure his memory.

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