

Life & Times

Marshall Marinker:

an appreciation



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Born 2 March 1930; died 10 June 2019

As a young GP, Marshall Marinker made two decisions that were to profoundly influence his professional life. They were to result in him becoming one of the greatest influences in developing general practice as an academic discipline.

First, in 1965 he applied to join a research group to look at the doctor-patient relationship, a previously ignored field. The group was being set up by Dr Michael Balint, a Hungarian psychoanalyst then working in London. At the end of the interview, accepting him into the group, Balint said to Marshall, *You're going to love the work; after all, you're a little bit crazy* — an anecdote Marshall shared just 4 weeks before he died when he was a key speaker earlier this year at the unveiling of an RCGP blue plaque to recognise Balint's enormous contribution to general practice. About the same time, keen to develop ideas for research, Marshall telephoned the (then) College of General Practitioners for advice. He was put in touch with some of the College's 'activists', whom Marshall acknowledged as being generous of their time and expertise.

There then followed a lifelong relationship with the College — and, most importantly, an invitation to join the small group that was to write *The Future General Practitioner: Learning and Teaching* (1972), the work that defined general practice as a specialty. Way

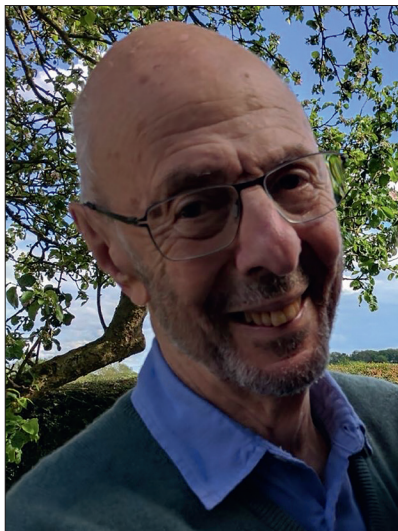
"At the end of the interview, accepting him into the group, Balint said to Marshall, 'You're going to love the work; after all, you're a little bit crazy.'"

ahead of its time, it remains a key work. Although never an officer of the College, he chaired a number of key committees within it and was one of Council's most influential members for many years. He became a tutor and then senior lecturer at St Mary's Hospital Medical School, and in 1974 was appointed to be Foundation Professor of Community Health at the University of Leicester Medical School.

In 1982 he was invited to become director of the MSD Foundation, a medical educational charity. Here he developed a series of leadership courses, designed to encourage and support some of the brightest and best young doctors in general practice from throughout the UK. In his later career he developed an interest in health service policy and wrote widely, and sometimes controversially, on this.

Marshall was born in Stepney Green

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in East London where his Polish Jewish parents had settled after moving from Warsaw in 1914. Marshall was evacuated to Bath at the onset of the Second World War, returning to London in 1946. He hoped to be a poet and he planned to study English at Cambridge University. His brother, who was 18 years older than him, was already a prize-winning medical student and Marshall had no wish to compete with him.

However, he changed his mind and, after national service, he secured a place at the Middlesex Hospital Medical School. After house jobs, he went straight into general practice, working as an assistant in a number of practices before starting his own practice in Grays, Essex.

He has three children by his first wife, Sheila; after they divorced, he met and married Jeanette, his soulmate for 45 years. In retirement he gained a master's degree in creative writing from City University.

In his fellowship nomination of him in 1971, John Horder wrote:

'What has impressed me most has been the breadth of his approach to medicine, his exceptional gift for abstract thought, for speaking and writing.'

In his passing, general practice has lost one of its greatest thinkers and writers.

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