Robin Mackenzie Norris
9 March 1931 - 20 September 2015
MBChB, MD, FRACP, FRCP, FCSANZ

Robin Mackenzie Norris died peacefully on 20 September 2016 at his home on the North Shore, Auckland, after a short illness. Robin was an outstanding doctor, researcher, teacher, and mentor.

Robin was born in Newcastle, UK, on 9 March 1931. His father Alan John Norris, was a Commander in the Royal Navy and stationed overseas for long periods. Robin arrived in New Zealand, at the age of 6 when his father was transferred on HMS Leander.

At the age of 10, Robin suffered a ruptured appendix followed by peritonitis. The infection spread and he developed sepsis of both hips and knees associated with severe pain and muscle spasms. Gradually the joints stiffened.

When he was 17 he underwent three operations in Boston to free up movements in his hips. He subsequently required two walking sticks to help him walk.

Robin graduated in 1955 from the then Dunedin School of Medicine, University of Otago, Dunedin. After house surgeon appointments at Auckland and Middlemore Hospital and medical registrar attachments at Auckland Hospital, he travelled to London. He married Iris, a casualty department staff nurse in 1963. He was awarded an MD from Birmingham University in 1965 on the subject of “the relative distribution of air and blood flow in the lungs”. He then returned to New Zealand as a junior medical specialist at Green Lane Hospital and was subsequently appointed director of research programmes by the Medical Research Council.

Robin was appointed physician in charge of the Coronary Care Unit at Green Lane Hospital from 1967 and Honorary Professor of Cardiovascular Therapeutics at the Auckland University School of Medicine (1980) until 1992, when he returned to the UK for 11 years.
Robin was the New Zealand representative on the Board of the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand from 1990-92 and was made a Life Member in 2002. He became a Fellow of the Society in 2004.

Robin’s contributions to medicine and to patient care were enormous. He helped set up the first coronary care unit (CCU) in New Zealand at Green Lane Hospital with Dr Laurie Reynolds in 1967 at the time the coronary epidemic was its height. Robin rounded every day in the CCU and came into hospital whenever a cardiac arrest occurred after hours in the CCU, general medical or surgical wards. He carefully followed patients for over 10 years after a heart attack, and developed what became known as the Norris index for predicting outcomes after heart attacks. He led several important studies at Green Lane with cardiology and cardiothoracic colleagues comparing patient outcomes with heart surgery and medical treatments. He was also a world leader in research, testing a number of approaches to reduce the size of heart attacks—particularly with beta blockers. His original insights and inspiration were pivotal to the work of colleagues at Oxford University, with the first International Study of Infarct Survival (ISIS) on the effects of the beta blocker atenolol on mortality.

He wrote over 200 original scientific papers, including anonymous editorials in the *Lancet*, predicting the future of coronary angioplasty. He also wrote an important book called *Myocardial Infarction: its presentation, pathogenesis and treatment*. The book was a notable contribution to our scientific knowledge about heart attacks, and over his career the mortality from heart attacks decreased 50%.

Robin was a great mentor and trained a number of registrars, funded by the New Zealand Medical Research Council (who work throughout the world), continuing Robin’s legacy, providing excellent care to patients, as well as teaching and undertaking research.

He also had much joy in teaching nurses and ran, along with others at Green Lane, a course for coronary care nurses for many years. Robin always had a patient-centred approach before it became an ‘in-vogue term’ and stated that “patients must never be made to feel guilty if they present as a false alarm when they come to hospital thinking they have had a heart attack.”

The picture of Robin sitting in his office wearing a white coat (which he always wore), his locator in his pocket, beside him a bookshelf with his books and his beloved journals, the *Lancet* and *Circulation*, is a true likeness.

Robin was a visionary, an inspiration to many, a motivator, an outstanding researcher, a wonderful compassionate doctor, and a lovely man. He has enhanced and enriched many lives and his legacy will live on.

Robin and Iris were a devoted couple. Robin nursed Iris during her long illness until her death in 2009.

Robin is survived by his sons Andrew and Richard and their wives and beloved grandchildren.

*The Society would like to thank Professor Harvey White who has kindly provided this Vale.*