

A Short Tribute to Peter Watson, 5 Feb 2017

Keith Martin, MD, FRCOphth

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Peter Watson at the age of 86 after a long battle with cancer that he faced with characteristic bravery and stoicism.

Peter Watson was a giant in the field of Ophthalmology, recognised internationally for his pioneering work on the mechanisms and treatment of blinding eye disease. During his career, Peter revolutionised the practice of ophthalmology. In the 1970s, working together with the late John Cairns, he developed an operation for glaucoma, the trabeculectomy, which remains to this day the most commonly performed surgical treatment for glaucoma worldwide. Glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible blindness in the world and trabeculectomy has had a huge effect in reducing the burden of blindness due to this disease. Peter's other enormous contributions to the field of ophthalmology include world-leading research on the mechanisms of scleral disease and the mechanisms of corneal graft rejection.

Peter held clinical appointments at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge and Moorfields Eye Hospital in London where he ran the Scleritis Clinic for many years. His landmark textbook, *'The Sclera and Systemic Disorders'* was first published in 1977; the 3rd edition was published in 2012 and remains only comprehensive text on the subject. Peter served as Editor of *Eye* from 1986-1993 and was Master of the Oxford Ophthalmological Congress amongst many other leadership roles. Major international awards included the Jules Francois International Research Gold Medal, the Duke Elder International Gold Medal and the Jules Francois International Research Gold Medal from the International Council of Ophthalmology.

Peter continued to contribute extensively after his "retirement" from the NHS in 1995, including spending 6 years as B  rhaave Professor at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. He remained incredibly active in the field of ophthalmology at a local, national and international level and held some of the most important posts in world ophthalmology, including the Presidency of the Academia Ophthalmologica Internationalis, the most senior organisation in the field.

Peter's charitable work was undertaken with enormous energy and enthusiasm. He worked extensively overseas including long term projects in India, Egypt, Pakistan and he also served as Deputy Hospitaller for the Order of St John of Jerusalem. As Founder and Chairman of the Cambridge Eye Trust, he helped raise over £1.5 million to support and advance eye research in Cambridge to improve treatment for our patients. He worked tirelessly to encourage potential donors to help the charity, organising charity concerts and other events in support of the Trust on a regular basis. He founded the Cambridge Ophthalmological Symposium in 1970 which has run every year since and is one of the major international research meetings in the ophthalmology calendar.

Internationally, Peter was responsible for setting up and running the International Council for Ophthalmology (ICO) Examinations, a structure which has driven up the standards of ophthalmology in many countries around the world. The ICO Examinations remain the only

worldwide medical-specialty examinations. They are independent and free of any outside influence and can be taken in the candidate's own country, so far by over 19,500 candidates.

Peter faced his final illness with great resilience and fantastic support from his wonderful family. He is survived by his wife Ann, his 5 children and many grandchildren.

Ebtisam Al Alawi, DO, FICO, FRCS, MRCOPhth

I am deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Mr. Peter Watson. My sincere condolences to the family. He was a great ophthalmologist, and we learned a lot from him. He will be missed; may his soul rest in peace. I am honored and blessed to have known him when I started to coordinate for the ICO exam. My prayers for peace & comfort at this hard time for the family.

Eduardo Alfonso, MD

Peter was the gentle giant of scleritis and beyond, as evidenced by this erudite writing on Galileo. He was a fantastic role model as a humble and accomplished physician scientist. I first met him when I was a cornea fellow at Mass Eye & Ear in 1984. His insights into the pathogenesis and treatment of scleritis were enlightening. Since then, I had the opportunity to interact with him in patient care, research and fortunate to socialize with him. His physical presence will be missed but his legacy will endure.

Best to all and long live Peter's contributions!

Pinar Aydin, MD, PhD

My story with Mr. Watson goes back to 1983 when he was invited by the Turkish Ophthalmology Society to deliver a conference on Scleritis and to perform extracapsular cataract (ECCE) operations, probably the first time in Turkey. Since I was asked to give a simultaneous translation of his presentation, I had carefully read his article on Scleritis to learn the subject well so as to be able to do the translation correctly. One thing from the article which stuck in my mind was the quotation of an order given by General Putnam, 'Gentleman, don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes', which was used as an allegory for the redness of Scleritis. General Israel Putnam (1718-1790) was an American General during the American Revolutionary War, who gave this famous order during the Battle of Bunker Hill. This taught me the importance of relating the science in the pages of an article to daily life, and at the same time made me realize that Mr. Watson was a down to earth man, who knew what life was really about.

Right after his conference he performed an ECCE operation and I had the good fortune to be assisting him. Towards the end of the operation there was a power cut and the electricity went off; we all panicked except him. He calmly put the final stitches under the microscope by the light of a penlight which I happened to have in my pocket. I learnt more from this than from the operation itself, namely that we always have to perform no matter what the conditions are. And,

to this day, I have done so, while always remembering him.

The next time I met Mr. Watson was in New Delhi in 2002 when I first joined ICO. We had quite a fun time at the customs, where we had a long chat on ophthalmology, professional and personal life issues, in fact about almost everything. This is when he invited me to join the ICO Assessment Committee on which I still have the honour to serve. When attending committee meetings, he would drive me back to Cambridge to meet his wife Mrs. Anne Watson and his lifelong secretary Ms. Rosemary Bell. It was so exciting for me to be in in their tiny ICO office, always followed by a Shakespeare play watching at Globe Theatre.

For me he was the perfect symbol of how to integrate diversity and create a collaborative, harmonious universal outcome. I am certain that his ideas and approach will always remain with us, despite his no longer being amongst us.



April 1983, Hacettepe University Eye Department, Ankara, Turkey. Left to right: Dr. Cagla Atabay, Dr. Murat Irkeç, Dr. Ali Sefik Sanac, ICO Examinations and Fellowship Committees member Dr. Pinar Aydin, Prof. Peter Watson, Dr. Erdal Tanay Oguz and Dr. Bora Eldem.

Wei He, MD, PhD

I am truly sorry to hear of the loss of Peter. He was truly a great person and will always be remembered. May his soul rest in peace. Please convey my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

Simon Keightley, FRCOphth, FRCS, MBBS

Peter was certainly a great man. The few times I met him, I was struck by his humility yet underneath the facade was obvious wisdom, wit and a razor-sharp mind. He will be much missed.

Dennis Lam, MD, FRCOphth, FRCS

A real big loss to the ophthalmic community worldwide! His spirit will always be with us and he must be now resting in heaven with peace, grace and honor!

I am really saddened by this news. Peter was the person , who brought me into the ICO fold. Have several fond memories of Peter.

Van Lansingh, MD, PhD

I remember him as a true scholar and gentleman, he will be missed and we owe him and his family gratitude.

Ciku Mathenge, FEACO, MD, PhD

I did not meet Prof Watson but reading all the tributes pouring in makes me really wish I had had the privilege of meeting such a giant of the ICO. Condolences to his family and friends from the ophthalmic community in Rwanda.

Venkatesh Prajna, FRCOphth, MBBS

In the mid-nineties, he was lecturing in Ahmedabad on Moorens ulcer. After the talk, I went to the podium and asked a few doubts, and he asked me where I was from. When I told him that I was from Aravind, he immediately asked me whether I would be interested to host the first ICO exam of India at Madurai. I immediately said yes, without understanding what it meant. So, for the first two years, we ran the pilot ICO exam courses (free of charge).

After four or five years, he invited me to select questions for the ICO exams, which I continue even this day. I have had the pleasure of staying with the Watsons in Cambridge (once along with Dr. Venkataswamy) twice and he took me to the Queen's college for dinner. He arranged the suit for me and personally put the bow tie for me (I didn't have a clue!!!) and took me to the dinner, which I would never forget. We used to spend time with Rosemary Bell in his tiny ICO office trying to refine the questions. Once Rosemary took me and Peter and Anne to her home for an afternoon English tea!!!!

I feel extremely lucky to have known him and Anne and would remember him throughout my life. May his soul rest in peace.

Muhammad Babar Qureshi, MD, MSc, BMBCh

Last year only he (Peter) collected 2500 books and Journals and sent them to an Institute in Pakistan. The resource center where the books are housed has been named after him. As he could not travel I had the honour to inaugurate the Peter Watson Resource center in Pakistan and

brought back a video for him and I have a very memorable photo (probably the most recent I have of him receiving the video in Cambridge) and I attach it with this e-mail. Till the end he was dedicated to education.



Prof. Peter Watson receives a video from ICO committee member Dr. Babar Qureshi in Cambridge of the inauguration of the Peter Watson Resource Center in Pakistan.

Robert Ritch, MD, FACS

I first met Peter when I was just starting my career and gave my first tour of Europe giving lectures on laser iridotomy and trabeculoplasty. No one was doing these at the time. My first stop was in Cambridge, where I met Peter, and we hit it off well and remained friends ever since. He was a great ophthalmologist, a productive leader, and a fine person. He will be missed.

Prin Rojanapongpun, MD

I met Prof. Watson for the first time in 1991 when I was a fellow with Prof. Stephen Drance in Vancouver and few more times in the past years. His teaching still holds true as we strive hard for a better outcome of filtering surgery and glaucoma care. I can't imagine what the glaucoma community must be feeling right now. My heartfelt condolences.

Ger van Rens, MD, PhD, FEBOphth

One of the éminence grises of ophthalmology past away. Peter will be remembered as a wise and humble man. Beside all his qualities, knowledge and contributions to ophthalmology worldwide, he was an excellent teacher. Peter will be remembered as one of those giants on which shoulders we are standing.

Bruce Spivey, MD, MS, MEd

Working closely with Peter, who was in every way a charming man, but fully determined and ready to fight for what he believed and desired, and along with Jean Jacques, we were eventually able to get enough support to implement ICO Exams on a trial basis. As is often said, the rest is history. There have been three Englishman at the helm, and each has added considerably to the quality and effectiveness of the Exams.



Prof. Watson, former ICO Secretary General and Vice President Jean-Jacques De Laey and Past President Bruce Spivey.

David Taylor, FRCOphth

Peter was iconoclastic, humorous, quizzical, and charming as those of us who knew him well, clearly realized. I am only sorry that I did not have a very recent contact with Peter before this lovely man departed. The ICO owes him a great deal, and we surely have lost a great friend.

In 1994 the ICO appointed an Education Committee under the Chairmanship of Professor Peter Watson. Its initial action was to recommend that all academic institutions should develop formal residency programmes. Peter, with Professor Jean-Jacques De Laey, also recognised that assessment of trainees by way of academically excellent and secure tests of knowledge would be vital to the prospering of the educational activities of the ICO as a whole. And so it was: the ICO Assessments, initially funded by a grant from the ICO Board, went from strength to strength with sparse premises and the unstinting work of Peter and Rosemary Bell, the first ICO Examinations employee. There has been an increase in candidate numbers every year except one. This was achieved by the continuous development of the original Basic Sciences, Optics and Refraction and Clinical exams and new Advanced Examination and an online foundation assessment. Peter was the leading light in the development of the ICO examinations and even after his retirement as Chairman of the ICO Examinations Committee he was still readily available for advice and always encouraging.

So, what was he like? That he was a top academic Ophthalmologist is well known, his field was inflammatory eye disease. But he was involved in many areas from treating amblyopia to glaucoma including the development and popularisation of trabeculectomy. He was a great clinician, charming to his patients and staff and, never over-organised in many aspects, he was a very good person to collaborate and was prominent in the organisation of highly successful academic meetings in Cambridge and elsewhere. Sociable, but quite retiring in many ways, he had a terrific sense of humour and few encounters with him ended without at least a chuckle. He was, even into old age, a formidable opponent at tennis especially when played on his grass court, the bumps and other obstacles of which he knew intimately.

Peter was a proud family man and will be sorely missed by them and his very many friends around the world, many made from his years of work for the International Council of Ophthalmology.

Clement CY Tham, BCh, BM, FCOphthHK, FCHSHK, FRCS

It is with great sadness to hear of the passing of Professor Peter Watson.

Peter travelled frequently to the Asia-Pacific region, and had made immense contributions to ophthalmic training and education in many countries in this region. In recognition and gratitude of these wonderful achievements, Peter was awarded the Jose Rizal International Medal by the Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology (APAO) in 2012. This is the highest named APAO award presented to outstanding personalities from outside the Asia-Pacific region whose contributions have been exceptionally valuable to ophthalmological developments in the Asia-Pacific region.

On a more personal level, Peter has been a long-time close friend of myself and our academic department at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). In April 2012, he set aside a week for us, lecturing ophthalmic residents and postgraduate research students at Hong Kong Eye Hospital. This turns out to be his last official visit to CUHK. He will always be deeply missed

here.

As a glaucoma surgeon who performs variations of trabeculectomy on a day-in day-out basis, I do of course have first-hand experience of his enormous contributions to the field of glaucoma management too.

May Peter rest in peace and grace with the Lord, and my deepest condolences to his beloved Family.

Mark O. M. Tso, MB, BS, D. Sc., FAAO, FRCS (Edin), FRC Ophth. (UK) FHKAM (Ophth.) FARVO

Peter Watson will be remembered as a great international educator as well as for his clinical expertise in diseases of the sclera and prolifera cornea and for his genuine warm friendship and leadership around the world.

As many of you may remember in 1995, Peter was appointed by Professor Nakajima, then President of ICO as the first Chairman of the Education Committee of ICO. At the time the major activity of ICO was to organize International Congresses of Ophthalmology every 4 years. Nakajima and Peter had the vision to improve international educational activity as one of the major goals of ICO. Peter with JJ De Laey and A. Rodriguez proposed that an international assessment test might stimulate interests of teachers and students around the continents to develop a high standard of ophthalmic practice and education. Peter organized the first International Assessment Test in October, 1994 in his private office at Cambridge. The assessment test grew very rapidly and became one of the major educational activity of ICO. The seed of International education sowed by Peter led to the International Ophthalmology Strategic Plan to Reserve and Restore Vision developed at the ICO Council Meeting on a cruise of the Nile River, when Godfrey OH Naumann and Bruce Spivey, then president of ICO and Secretary General of ICO respectively, appointed Bradley Straatsma and Mark Tso as Co-Chairs to start four task forces on ophthalmic education and curricula in 1999-2000.

Peter's teaching, friendship and leadership among different ophthalmic communities around the world has been heartwarming. He visited Asia many times especially during the establishment of the College of Ophthalmologists of Hong Kong and the Peking University Eye Center in Beijing, China. He taught and encourages these Asia Communities in their early development. We have stood on the shoulders of this giant in international ophthalmic education to move forward in the last several decades. To him, we shall be forever grateful.