A FINE INNINGS

Following his father into medicine, Michael Handley Ashken started his training at the age of 17, just three months after the inception of the NHS. At the Middlesex Hospital he displayed considerable talent, winning prizes in Surgery and Orthopaedics and gaining Honours in the MBBS exam. After qualification in 1955, he completed his house jobs at the Middlesex and held appointments in Guildford and Manchester, before passing the FRCS and returning to London in 1959. The following year, he received his call for National Service and was sent to Germany, but he niftily arranged a swap and went on to serve with the Royal Army Medical Corps in Malaya for the following two years, achieving the rank of Major.

It was after his return to London that he came to work with Sir Eric Riches and Richard Turner Warwick, both of whom proved huge influences on his future career. While completing what was then a very general surgical training, he wrote his Master's thesis, which later resulted in a Hunterian Oration in 1966 entitled ‘A study of regional vascular patterns in hypertension, chronic pyelonephritis and other diseases’. He completed his training with a happy year in a Fellowship at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York.

In 1968, Michael was appointed as the first consultant urologist to the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. Together with Alan Green, he rapidly established one of the first UK urology units outside London – a unit that was soon recognised by colleagues and trainees for the excellent surgical experience and training that it offered. Hugely popular amongst trainees and colleagues, he took on both the lead role for education in the hospital and the Chairmanship of the Consultant Staff Committee, before expanding into regional and national roles. In terms of his clinical work, he soon became recognised internationally for his expertise and innovation in reconstructive urology, and especially his interest in continent urinary diversion.

As his reputation grew, Michael took on more national roles, culminating in his appointments as President of the Urological Section of the Royal Society of Medicine and later, in 1994, as President of BAUS. This was, ironically, a year after he himself was found to have a bladder tumour – fortunately the odd cystoscopy did not interfere with two very successful presidential years.

Outside urology, he was a keen and a very successful sportsman, with a particular passion for cricket. Having himself been an accomplished batsman and aficionado of the game, it was soon understood that a similar interest was very much to the advantage of candidates for junior posts in Norwich!

At the same time as pursuing his passions for urology, sports, woodwork, wine and much else, Michael was, above all, a family man. Married to Iris for over 60 years, he took greatest pleasure in the company and progress of his three children and six grandchildren. Although frustrated by ill health in his final years, he remained a great support to his colleagues, friends and to urology in general.

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