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**Mrs Patricia Wilkie**, Research Fellow, St George's Hospital Medical School.

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**Dr Kenneth M Boyd**, Secretary.

## References

- (1) Hippocratic Oath. In: Duncan A S, Dunstan G R, Welbourn R B eds. *Dictionary of medical ethics*, revised edition. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1981: 210.
- (2) See reference (1): Declarations: 132.
- (3) General Medical Council. *Professional conduct and discipline: fitness to practise*. London: General Medical Council, 1983: 18–21.
- (4) General Medical Council. Statement sent to all doctors in the UK: paragraph 19. *IME bulletin* 1988; 41, Aug: 5f.
- (5) See reference (4): paragraph 17.
- (6) See reference (4): paragraph 10.

## Obituary

### Professor Archie Duncan, DSC, Hon MD (Edin), FRCSE, FRCOG

Archie Duncan, who died in Edinburgh on 1st October at the age of 78, achieved much in a number of diverse fields, most recently in medical ethics. To that discipline he brought a formidable range of experience and skills acquired over the years in obstetrics, war, medical education and the arcane politics of university life. He was an idealist who would have been embarrassed to be identified as such and at the same time an unsurpassed but utterly modest fixer.

In committee he was a master, with an instant and untiring grasp of issues, personalities and timing. That, with his gift for the short, quiet phrase that bestowed reward, consensus or condign punishment, made him a welcome ally, a feared opponent and a much sought-after chairman. Where lesser doctors affect to despise committee work, he relished it. He simply excelled, and once confided that his obstetric past had been ideal preparation: to confront the unpromising, achieve the unexpected, and do so against a non-negotiable deadline often in the unsociable hours had nurtured, he conceded, certain useful skills over the decades.

He was born in India, the son of a Church of Scotland missionary, and graduated MB ChB from Edinburgh in 1936. After obstetric training he served from 1941 to 1945 as an RNVR medical officer. His Distinguished Service Cross was awarded for his part in retrieving casualties from his ship, the destroyer HMS Pakenham, prior to her abandonment and sinking after a convoy action in the Mediterranean. It is entirely characteristic of Archie Duncan that even close friends were unaware of the details of this until after his death.

In 1966, while professor of obstetrics and gynaecology in Cardiff, he sustained a myocardial infarction which prompted him to return to Edinburgh as executive dean of the faculty of medicine and professor of medical education. He flourished, and the institution and countless individuals benefited. There have been many beloved doctors, rather fewer beloved administrators. As executive dean Archie Duncan was genial, courteous, wise and untiring. In the late 1960s, when students throughout Europe were seduced by visions of revolution, Archie's were attending faculty liaison meetings and finding out how the world really worked, and still works. Many of us are permanently indebted to him.

He was an early and important sponsor of the Edinburgh Medical Group and in that capacity played a key role in setting up the research activities of the Institute of Medical Ethics. He jointly edited the *Dictionary of Medical Ethics* and served on the governing body of the IME for many years. He was a founding consulting editor of the *Journal of Medical Ethics*. Recognising the importance of medical ethics in medical education, he used his considerable influence to promote it in Edinburgh and elsewhere.

He was a very organised man. To keep track of his many and various schemes, ploys and projects, he used to make notes on little white index cards filed first in his top pocket. In due course, his instructions concerning funeral arrangements were found on one such card. Everything went according to plan.

Colin Currie