

OBITUARY

Gordon Gregory Gibson Crane
MB BS (U Qld), MD (UNSW), FRACP, FRCPA
10 June 1933 - 29 June 2000



Greg Crane was born in Rockhampton in Central Queensland and grew up on the shores of Moreton Bay – on Bribie Island and at Manly. He was educated at Wynnum High School and completed his secondary education in 1951 by achieving the highest pass in Queensland in the Senior Examination. In 1952 he was awarded the Raff Memorial Scholarship and in 1953 the John Weinholt Memorial Scholarship. He attended the University of Queensland where he graduated from the Medical School with Honours in 1957.

He spent the first years as a graduate at the Royal Brisbane Hospital, gained the membership of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (MRACP) in 1964 and that same year joined the Haematology Department at Prince Henry Hospital (PHH) in Sydney as the Senior Fellow in Haematology, in a unit just being developed by Professor Bob Pitney. Under Bob Pitney's guidance, he adopted the

compassionate approach to the care of patients with haematological disease which was to be the hallmark of his medical practice. However, perhaps the most noteworthy thing about his stay at PHH was his introduction to malaria, tropical splenomegaly syndrome (TSS) and Papua New Guinea (PNG), all of which were to fascinate him for the rest of his life.

In 1964, Bob Pitney, with the support of the Department of Public Health in the then Territory of Papua and New Guinea and the financial support of the Wellcome Trust, had been instrumental in establishing a Haematology Research Unit at the Angau Memorial Hospital in Lae, primarily for the study of the tropical splenomegaly syndrome. Bob Pitney had become aware of this disease during a medical survey of Papua New Guinea in 1963. The first medical officer in charge of the Unit, Don Pryor, established that TSS afflicted over 80% of the Anga inhabitants of the Upper Watut Valley of Morobe District, the highest incidence of this disease of unknown aetiology in the world. Don defined the basic parameters of the disease, gross splenomegaly and high immunoglobulins, particularly IgM, and showed that the anaemia which was usually present was in part due to extreme expansion of the plasma volume. In 1966, Greg joined the unit at Angau as medical officer in charge. Under the supervision of Bob Pitney and later of Professor Bob Walsh he studied the mode of production and causation of the hypervolaemia in TSS, for which later, in 1971, he was awarded an MD by the University of New South Wales.

The Research Unit continued at Angau until 1969, when it was transferred to the Institute of Human Biology (later, Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research) as the Haematology Department, first at Madang and then at Goroka. In 1969 Greg went to London as a Wellcome Research Scholar in the Department of Haematology of the Royal

Postgraduate Medical School. In that crowded year he later returned to take up his appointment as the haematologist on the research staff of the Institute. He established a small field unit, staffed by Paul and Brydget Hudson, in the Upper Watut Valley to allow further surveys and extended studies of selected villages to be contrasted with surveys at Wantoat and Kaiapit. The results of clinical, serological, biochemical and genetic studies showed that in the Watut population the disease represented an aberrant immune response to stable, mesoendemic malaria in a highland subpopulation of great antiquity, which had recently (in the last 100 years) moved to the coastal region and therefore lacked the innate immunity to malaria of coastal populations. Further studies confirmed growing theories that the basis for the disease lay in a genetically determined failure of immunoregulation at the level of immunosuppression with extraordinarily high concentrations of IgM and IgM fluorescent antimalarial antibodies and the formation of high molecular weight immune complexes. These studies encompassed collaborations with a very wide group of scientists including Alister Voller at the Nuffield Institute of Comparative Medicine in London, Bob Pitney at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School in Hammersmith, Keith McAdam and Angela Gardner at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the staff of the Haematology Division at PHH and the Tissue Typing Laboratory of the Blood Transfusion Service in Sydney. Various parts of the investigation were financially supported by the Wellcome Trust, the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia and the Tropical Diseases Research Programme of the World Health Organization.

Greg established, under the supervision of Paul and Brydget Hudson, a trial of long-term antimalarial therapy in a number of villages in the Watut. This was highly successful with significant shrinkage of the spleen in over 70% of subjects and disappearance of the disease in many. There were no deleterious effects and with ongoing assistance from the Institute and the Department of Public Health it became a self-reliant ongoing therapeutic modality in the villages, administered by the village communities themselves.

During his time in Papua New Guinea, Greg was extensively involved in establishing the pathogenesis of anaemia on the coast and in the highlands, with special reference to iron and folate dietary deficiency, parasitic diseases and pregnancy. Being the only haematologist in PNG for much of his stay, he provided a consultant service to the Health Department. In 1972 he was appointed Deputy Director of the Institute and at various times he served as Acting Director. In late 1973 he took a year's sabbatical leave to continue his research work in London as a Visiting Research Fellow at the Nuffield Institute of Comparative Medicine.

In 1972 Greg became FRACP (Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians) and in 1975 FRCPA (Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia). He left Papua New Guinea to return to Australia in January 1975, and took up an appointment as Senior Consultant in Medicine and Director of Haematology at Concord Repatriation General Hospital in Sydney and Lecturer in Medicine at the University of Sydney. He had great regrets at leaving Papua New Guinea and was delighted when he was invited by the new Director of the PNG IMR, Michael Alpers, to continue his studies with the Anga people in the Upper Watut Valley. These later years were marked by studies into the immune response to malaria and HLA markers in the Anga with Ron Walls and the staff of the Immunology Department at Concord and also with Helen Bashir and the staff of the Tissue Typing Laboratory of the Blood Transfusion Service in Sydney. These enabled new collaborations with Sue Serjeantson and Kuldeep Bhatia in the analysis of the genetic background of the disease. Greg continued to serve on the Malaria Research Advisory Committee in Papua New Guinea.

Life at Concord Hospital encompassed clinical and laboratory responsibilities and an extensive undergraduate and graduate teaching and examining program which included, from time to time, the medical schools of PNG and Universiti Sains Malaysia, Khota Baru, and the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. When in England, Greg gave occasional lectures at a number of London institutions including the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Hospital for Tropical Diseases

and St Bartholomew's Hospital. For many years he was responsible for devising and supervising the haematology examinations for the general pathology qualification of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia. He was heavily involved in the administration of the Pathology Department at Concord, often acting as Chairman of the Department during years of rapid change including the transfer of the hospital from Commonwealth to State health jurisdiction. He enjoyed serving on hospital and area health committees, including the Department of Medicine and Staff Councils, the Ethics Committee and the Drug Committee, which he chaired for many years. He made many contributions to various committees of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. His research interests at Concord included the control of anticoagulant therapy, the natural history of myeloproliferative disorders and the therapy of haematological malignancies. He always retained an interest in practical issues of haematology teaching in developing countries, serving on the Committee for Education and Training of the International Society of Haematology from 1982 until his death. In 1992 he was appointed Clinical Associate Professor in Medicine at the University of Sydney.

Greg was a member of a number of professional organizations, including the Australian and International Societies of Haematology and Blood Transfusion, the

Medical Society of Papua New Guinea, the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, the Australian and International Societies of Travel Medicine and the Australian and International Societies of the History of Medicine. However, since malaria was his hobby and his great love as well as his research interest, he enjoyed nothing as much as attending International Meetings of Tropical Medicine, Malaria and Parasitology where he could share his special interests, meet mentors and collaborators and keep up with developments, and where he felt especially comfortable and at home.

Greg never got over his boyhood wonder at 'life, the universe and all that'. He had wide interests, in literature, language, history, archaeology and cosmology. However, he had a special passion for classical music dating from his childhood and greatly enjoyed his record and CD collections and his many books about music.

Greg is survived by his wife Helen, his former wife Lyn Gold, his sons Simon and Nigel and his grandchildren Jeremy and Emily.

Helen Bashir

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