

Obituary

Michael Lennon 1943 – 2021

Professor Michael Lennon OBE, who died aged 78 on 9th April, was born and raised in Liverpool and qualified from Liverpool Dental School 1966. He had always been interested in wider perspectives in dentistry and in 1968, after a brief period in general practice, he studied for the Diploma in Public Dentistry at Dundee Dental School.

On obtaining the diploma, with distinction in four of the six subjects, Mike was appointed by the University of Manchester as a Lecturer in Periodontology and Dental Public Health in 1969. He became a Senior Lecturer in Community Dentistry there in 1980. In Manchester he worked closely with Professor Phil Holloway, and together with colleagues such as Martin Downer, Denis O'Mullane, Andrew Rugg-Gunn, Cynthia Pine and statistician Helen Worthington, they established a Dental Health Unit, sponsored by Colgate through Graham Davies. The Unit carried out many clinical trials of differing fluoride dentifrice formulations, but also became a stimulating forum. One outcome of their constant discussions was the concept of providing part of undergraduate dental education outside the four walls of a Dental School in an environment reflecting that in which the students would practise. This approach, that became known as "Outreach", was initially opposed by traditional dental educators, but was subsequently adopted by every dental school in the country. Mike and Phil were also designers and co-Directors of the groundbreaking trial of a Capitation system of remuneration of general dental practitioners for the Department of Health. Mike's enthusiasm for what we now call evidence-based dentistry was also aroused in this period, working with colleagues such as Professor Bill Shaw. The aspect of education that he most enjoyed was the supervision of many postgraduate students. His challenging but supportive approach, and his skill in bringing out the best in his students was greatly appreciated by them.



In 1985 he became the first Regional Dental Officer (part-time) for the North-Western Regional Health Authority, working with colleagues who had recently moved from the West Midlands, where fluoridation had been successfully introduced in 1966. Mike's support for fluoridation now became a strong commitment, and he became Chairman of the British Fluoridation Society, a position he held from 1987 until 2012. There has probably never been such a passionate advocate of fluoridation.

In 1989 he was appointed by the University of Liverpool to a Chair in Periodontology and Preventive Dentistry. The Chair was subsequently re-titled Dental Public Health. The University of Liverpool honoured him as an Emeritus Professor on his retirement.

In 2003, he did not find the prospect of full-time retirement appealing. He moved to the University of Sheffield as Director of the school's developing Outreach Programme. Under his leadership, the programme expanded so that every dental student spent six months working in NHS primary dental care. Maintaining his evidence-based approach, the roll-out of this programme involved a randomised controlled trial that demonstrated that outreach increased students' ability to formulate realistic treatment plans. Mike retired from Sheffield in 2009.

Mike's immense commitment to Dental Public Health continued until prevented recently by ill-health. During his career he published over 100 articles in refereed journals, on a wide range of topics including fluoridation, capitation, periodontal epidemiology, establishment of new dental practices and the management of dental anxiety. His life-long concern about social injustice and health inequalities influenced much of his research. He was a busy referee for twenty journals and was in global demand as an External Examiner and as a Guest Lecturer.

In 2010 he became Editor of this journal, a hugely time-consuming commitment he performed with distinction until 2016. A founder member of BASCD, he served the Association as secretary, 1977 – 1981, and President 1984 – 1985.

His contribution to oral health was recognized with the award of the OBE in the Queen's 80th Birthday Honours List.

Away from work his interests included classical music, and he and Gill frequently attended concerts by the Hallé and BBC Philharmonic Orchestras in Manchester, especially if they were playing music by Shostakovich, Prokofiev or Rachmaninov. His support of Everton F.C. was often sorely tried.

His busy professional life would not have been possible without the support of his wife Gill, whom he met at Liverpool Dental School. They celebrated their Golden Wedding in December 2019.

We extend condolences to Gill, to their children, Sarah, Helen, Kate and Christopher, and their nine grandchildren on the loss of a remarkable, lovable and irreplaceable man.

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