



Jeremy Dashwood Phelps Hopkins

Jeremy Hopkins was on the beach at Seatoun on April 10, 1968, the day of the Wahine disaster.

Fifty-one people died that day as the interisland ferry foundered and capsized in an atrocious southerly but hundreds more were in urgent need of attention as they came ashore.



Mr Hopkins and a colleague, Dick Aldridge, drove from Wellington Hospital to render assistance on the spot.

Many had broken limbs or were suffering multi-system trauma and urgently needed skilled triage and prompt resuscitation.

It was a crisis where a highly competent and cool-headed surgeon could make the difference between life and death.

Mr Hopkins was an excellent orthopaedic surgeon who commanded the respect of patients, students and medical colleagues.

He had what one colleague described as an effortless superiority—he did things as well as anybody and did it without obviously trying. There was a dexterity about his surgery that improved the outcome for many of his patients.

A good manner went with the competence. In theatre he never needed to raise his voice, an expressive raised eyebrow was usually enough to get his message across and he had a good sense of humour that encouraged everybody in the theatre to work as a team.

His humour was honed at Otago University where he was the tone-deaf soprano in the university capping review, enjoyed “diplomatic club” dinners with fellow students and a mysterious Monsieur X, and he was there the day the old jalopy he shared with other students was ultimately shoved over the edge of a cliff. He had a very full professional life—he had his own practice in addition to his role as visiting surgeon to Wellington and Wairau hospitals, the Home of Compassion Hospital and the Artificial Limb Centre.

He gave up time on his weekends to attend weekly spina bifida clinics at Wellington Hospital and worked at the Puketiro Clinic for Disabled Children.

As honorary surgeon to the New Zealand School of Dance and the Royal New Zealand Ballet, his expertise was called on to identify potential problems in aspiring young dancers. Both he and his wife regularly enjoyed the ballet.

He also had a long involvement in medical politics, serving as president of the Wellington division of the Medical Association and then on the national body, chairing its council, its ethical committee and was ultimately elected to its presidency.

Medical education was another area of expertise. In addition to his teaching duties, he was a member of the New Zealand committee of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, an examiner in orthopaedics and became president of the New Zealand Orthopaedics Association in 1992. He was also an orthopaedic consultant to the Fijian Government, served on the World Health Organization working party on road trauma, and on a number of government committees.

Though he retired from active surgery in the late 1990s, he continued doing medicolegal work in Australia and New Zealand as a consultant to lawyers, the ACC and insurance companies. He was past president of the Medico-Legal Society and was New Zealand adviser to the Medical Defence Union.

His opinions were always forthright. Just a couple of months before he died, aged 70, he contributed some robust and apparently telling advice on a draft Medical Association policy on the issue of cultural competency in medicine.

He could be provocative but was always good company.

Jeremy Dashwood Phelps Hopkins, orthopaedic surgeon. B December 30, 1934; ed Scots Coll, Vic Uni, Otago Uni Med Sch, FRCS 1965, FRACS 1968; m 1960 Judith Moore, 4d; d Auckland August 21, 2005.

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