



Peter Nigel Black

10 April 1957–10 January 2010

Professor Peter Nigel Black was born in Auckland, and was the first of two sons born to Dr Harry Black and Dr Ruth Black who practised there for many years.



He grew up in a family who travelled widely in New Zealand and overseas. Early on he learnt to love art and history and New Zealand nature.

When doing his postgraduate training in England he met Bernadette Salmon, who was doing research in paediatrics, and persuaded her to come back to New Zealand with him. There she became his much loved wife and they were proud and loving parents of Claire.

Peter left Auckland Grammar School when he was aged 16 as he had won a scholarship, and enrolled at the University of Auckland, where he completed his MBChB in 1980. At the time of his sudden death he was Professor of Clinical Pharmacology at the University of Auckland.

The following obituary, published in the University of Auckland News, was written by his colleagues, Professor Iain Martin (Dean, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences), Associate Professor Phillippa Poole (Department of Medicine), Professor Ian Reid (Deputy Dean, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences), and Associate Professor James Paxton (Head of Department, Pharmacology and Clinical Pharmacology).

He continued with his postgraduate medical training in New Zealand and 5 years later obtained his Fellowship of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians. That year, his academic talents were recognised through the awarding of a Medical Research Council Overseas Research Fellowship. This saw Peter move to Britain where he spent the next 3 years in the Department of Clinical Pharmacology, at Hammersmith Hospital, in London, under the mentorship of Professor Sir Colin Dollery, one of the founding fathers of the discipline of clinical pharmacology.

This period in London was seminal for Peter and sparked his long-standing interest in clinical pharmacology in general and in respiratory pharmacology specifically. His subsequent academic career was built upon these two strands, a path that saw him appointed to the Chair of Clinical Pharmacology in 2008.

Peter's research career was unusual in its breadth and its depth, covering the complete spectrum from basic research through to translational and clinical research in its many forms, including Cochrane database analysis and investigator-initiated clinical trials.

Furthermore, the research questions that he addressed were pivotal, especially in the field of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

In addition, the epidemiological studies that he was involved in aimed to answer the critical questions on the role of diet, bacteria and vitamin D in the incidence of asthma and will provide important clinical information on this disease, which is particularly prevalent in New Zealand.

Peter published widely and, even with a career cut cruelly short, he had more than 90 peer-reviewed publications and book chapters, with papers in the highest-ranking general medical journals, such as *The Lancet* and *The New England Journal of Medicine*.

Similarly, Peter was very successful in obtaining grant funding from the major funding bodies such as the Health Research Council, Auckland Medical Research Foundation and others, including the National Heart Foundation and Child Health Research Foundation.

One of Peter's most significant contributions was to the "Quality and safety of medicines" initiatives where he made major efforts to improve prescribing nationwide. This is particularly critical at this time in medical practice when new and more complex medicines are becoming available, and where the patient population is ageing and often presenting with co-morbidities requiring treatment with multiple drugs.

His wide involvement in all aspects of medical research and clinical practice impacted very positively on Peter's teaching, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. He made enormous contributions to undergraduate medical teaching and received the best lecturer award on three occasions (in 2003, 2005 and 2007) from the Medical Students' Association. His stature as a researcher was also demonstrated by numerous invited lectures at both national and international conferences.

Clinically, Peter was passionate not only about clinical pharmacology, but perhaps most significantly about the importance of medical generalists and general medicine. He undoubtedly championed general medicine at a time when the pressures for increasing subspecialisation made this a difficult furrow to plough. Peter was a consummate diagnostician and loved nothing better than to debate diagnoses and patient management, and was increasingly interested in clinical reasoning.

As an individual, Peter, while a serious thinker and a dedicated clinician, had a keen sense of humour. He was a fountain of knowledge, both medical and general, and his opinion was sought by a large variety of individuals and government bodies. For instance, he sat on a wide range of national committees, such as the Ministry of Health Medicines Assessment Advisory Committee and HRC's Standing Committee on Therapeutic Trials, to name just two. He brought energy, integrity and frankness to every activity with which he engaged.

Professor Peter Black was a true champion of the disciplines of clinical pharmacology and academic general medicine, and his sudden loss will be widely felt. He will be mourned by his colleagues, both academic and clinical, his students and trainees. Our thoughts and sympathies are with Bernadette, Claire and Peter's wider family.