Obituary

Keith Jefferson

Tragically Keith Jefferson died in October 1977 at the age of 54, at the height of his career. Renowned in his field of diagnostic cardiac radiology, he will be sadly missed at St George’s and the National Heart and Chest Hospitals where he worked all his life, and also abroad since his lectures and his book made him very well known.

Educated at Oundle and Clare College, Cambridge, he went to Guy’s Hospital as a clinical student and qualified in 1946; he obtained the MRCP in 1950. He chose to specialise in radiology, and after training at St George’s Hospital was appointed to the consultant staff there and at the Brompton Hospital in 1956. His main interest was always the heart, so that when the new south block at the National Heart Hospital opened in 1961, Jefferson was the natural choice as radiologist. The excellence of his work was soon recognised internationally. A great part of his success was due to his ability to integrate cardiac medicine and radiology. Postgraduates flocked to his teaching sessions and as a lecturer he was outstanding. International demand for his lectures grew and he undertook many lecture tours abroad, particularly in South America. Winner of the Barclay prize of the British Institute of Radiology in 1960, he was a member of the British Cardiac Society and the Thoracic Society and in 1971 he delivered the National Heart Hospital St Cyres Lecture. He wrote extensively and won esteem in particular as co-author of Clinical Cardiac Radiology, the fruit of patient hours of teaching and research spread over a number of years. He will be remembered as a successful chairman of the National Heart Hospital Medical Committee, being patient and tolerant, polite but firm, and always managing to retain the friendship and respect of his colleagues.

He arrived on the London scene at a time when cardiac radiology was largely in the hands of the cardiologists who derived much information by supplementing their clinical findings with fluoroscopy. There were imperfections in their analysis of the lung fields and the new technique of angiocardiology was raising many difficulties in interpretation. Well equipped with clinical information, stimulated to analyse the lung fields by Dr George Simon, and above all working closely with the clinicians and pathologists, Keith Jefferson’s opinion was widely sought by physicians and surgeons alike. This was partly due to his having worked in the cardiac department of St George’s Hospital early in his career, which enabled him more easily to dovetail the history and clinical and haemodynamic findings with the radiological appearances. His approach to a problem was always simple and straightforward and indeed his most successful lecture was on the interpretation of the straight x-ray film. Nevertheless he was always at the front with new techniques and carried out coronary arteriography both experimentally and in the human subject at St George’s before it was used elsewhere in this country.

Always a very humble and fair man with an unusually critical insight into his own work, advances in other diagnostic techniques such as nuclear medicine and echocardiography in latter years made him doubt the continuing value of radiology. It was sad that these very qualities should have led him to lose confidence in his speciality, perhaps not realising that radiology was still the gold standard and no doubt will remain so for many years.

AUBREY LEATHAM
Obituary: Keith Jefferson.

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*Br Heart J* 1978 40: 1193
doi: 10.1136/hrt.40.10.1193

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