

## ***In Memory of Dr George Garratty, PhD, FRCPath***

Died, March 17, 2014 at his home near Los Angeles



Worldwide Dr George Garratty was known as a leading Immunoematologist with over 50 years of service in the field. He also served on several national committees, including the Standards Committee of the American Association of Blood Banks and as an Associate Editor of "Transfusion". He also represented North America on the International Society of Blood Transfusion Council. He regularly came to Canada to lecture at CSTM and other scientific meetings. He published more than 300 scientific papers and had been an author and editor of nine textbooks.

But when I remember George (Dr Garratty) I think first, not of the famous Scientist, but of a very young boy living through the evacuation from London, along with hundreds of other children, to a safe place in the countryside. The heavy bombing during the Blitz of London in WWII caused many families to send their children to safety into the arms of unknown people; it was a heartbreaking time for all.

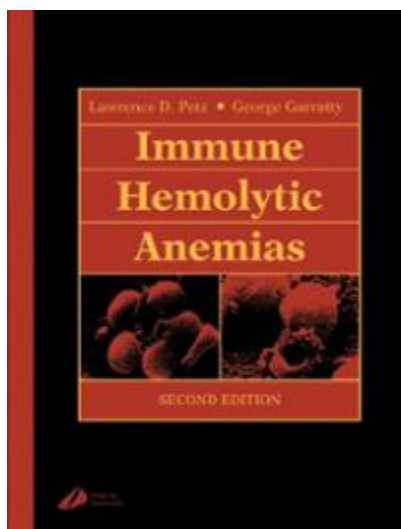
Following the War it was still mandatory for all able-bodied men to serve two years of National Service in the Military. George was intent on becoming a Veterinarian but before he could attend the Royal Veterinary College he was required to complete his Military Service. Undeterred he called the local hospital,

knowing that hospitals kept animal houses, he asked if they had any summer jobs while he was waiting to go into the Army.

They responded by telling him ‘Dr. Dacie (later Professor Sir John Dacie) Chief of the Hematology Department is very short of staff and might be willing to talk to you and take you on.’ The rest is, as they say, history. Working with Dr Dacie George Garratty became hooked and gave up the idea of becoming a veterinarian; instead he embarked upon laboratory work in the hospital’s Hematology Department, which included the Blood Bank.

Another famous transfusion pioneer, Dr. Patrick L. Mollison, who, at the time, was performing his seminal work on RBC antibodies and their clinical significance, worked just down the corridor from Dr. Dacie. Without even realizing it, George Garratty was working alongside the world’s two greatest pioneers in hematology and transfusion medicine, and he was brave enough (in part he said, because he did not realize how famous they were) to impose on them, asking questions, and discussing interesting cases with them.

He came to the U.S. in 1968 to carry out research with Dr. Larry Petz in San Francisco (who he had met as a Fellow in Dr Dacie’s Lab). Together he and Dr Petz would later write what has become THE text on Immune Hemolytic Anemias.



After 10 years of 100% grant-dependent research in San Francisco, he was offered a job as scientific director to start a research program at the American Red Cross Blood Center in Los Angeles. After a few years, he “inherited” two other

departments: Reference Services (red cell and HLA/platelet immunology) and Community Education

Dr. Garratty's vision and leadership did not go unnoticed by the transfusion medicine and blood banking communities. He received more than a dozen awards for his efforts, at the international, national, and state levels as well as nine lectureships. He was especially proud of two awards; a lifetime achievement award for Dr. Garratty and Dr. Petz from the AABB, which praised their lifelong work improving the understanding of immune hemolytic anemia. The award is so prestigious that it is only given out every five or more years. At the time, Dr. Garratty did not even realize it was their top award; only four other people have received the award. Another award deeply meaningful to Dr. Garratty was the top award of the British Transfusion Society, the James Blundell Award, bestowed upon him in 2007.

When asked what projects he had worked on, was he was most passionate about he included: developing laboratory approaches to help physicians arrive at the correct diagnosis and select the best blood for patients who are suspected of having immune hemolytic anemia; developing a test to predict clinical significance of alloantibodies (monocyte monolayer assay) and applying flow cytometry to study blood group antigen/antibodies

He was most proud of the results he had achieved in educating people (of all levels) who had attended his lectures, and read his scientific publications and textbooks. A good example of this occurred at an ISBT meeting in Mexico. On the first day, a hematologist came up to introduce himself. He said "Dr. Garratty, I have wanted to thank you for many years. About 20 years ago, you gave some lectures in Venezuela. I had just started my career and your lectures and textbooks inspired me to pursue hematology as a career." These types of interactions occurred many times for Dr Garratty, especially at international meetings. They were a great source of satisfaction to him.

Dr Garratty had a great passion for his work and this is shown by the grueling schedule he kept, below I have outlined an average day:

He would get up at 4:15 to 4:30 a.m., leaving his home at 5 a.m. (He had a 54 mile, one way commute and wanted to miss traffic jams) he arrived at work at 6 a.m. That was a relatively peaceful time, so he could review/reply to emails and phone East Coast colleagues; many of the emails (e.g., concerning patient problems, needed him to review literature before he replied). Most days he would have internal meetings after 8 a.m. (e.g., research group, management group), meetings with his direct reports [e.g., RBC and platelet reference labs, community education (including SBB School)]. Some days he would give lectures in-house, or at local hospitals. Some days they would have visitors from California, other states, or international. There were Blood Transfusion Medicine Fellows and pathology residents who spent several days to several weeks with them. Most days he would get phone calls concerning unusual cases of immune hemolytic anemia; many of these were from out of State or out of Country. He would try to get on the freeway to go home by 3 p.m. (every 30 minutes it gets worse after 3 p.m.). He would work at home Friday (and Saturday, and Sunday mornings) to get his writing (publications) and lectures done, and work on papers submitted to *Transfusion* (he was an Associate Editor).

He felt it was a challenge to draw people into Transfusion Medicine. Just as his mentors, Professors Dacie and Mollison inspired his interest in the field, Dr. Garratty urged, “Try to reach students as young as possible to get them interested and curious about the world of Hematology and Transfusion Medicine. We’re all so busy, but we have to find the time to reach out to high school — and even younger — students, and get them interested in science and blood.”

Like many of us in Transfusion Medicine, Dr. Garratty felt that transfusion medicine across the planet is like a family. When he traveled to South Africa (when Apartheid was on the way out), he marveled over the fact that people from different races, all in the transfusion field, sat around the table together — all talking happily about blood banking. “To me,” Dr. Garratty concluded, “that bonding over our curiosity about blood and science is the great joy of working in this field.

As Canadians we certainly felt he was part of our family, he never hesitated to accept an invitation to come here and share his knowledge, and his smile, with all of us.

I would like to close this walk down memory lane with a few photos of George the man, not the Scientist. We both had a great love of dogs and he was fortunate to have shared his life with many Great Danes; one of his favorite spots was Carmel in California so I am sharing with you some family photos of George, his wife Eileen and their beloved Great Danes Henley, Marlow and Toby which were taken in Carmel a few Christmases ago. Just before his death Eileen shared that she had told him he was off to the Rainbow Bridge where all the dogs they had loved, frolic and wait for them in a field of golden poppies. Altogether they had 10 Great Danes so he will have his work cut out for him, walking them.

*Rachel (Ray) Berger*  
*Past President, CSTM*

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