Professor Kenneth D Bagshawe CBE, MD, Hon DSc, FRCP, FRCOG, FRCR, FRS

After wartime service in the Royal Navy, Ken Bagshawe studied at St Mary's Hospital Medical School. In the 1950's he treated two women with advanced metastatic gestational choriocarcinoma with a combination of 6-mercaptopurine and methotrexate, the first reported cases of combination chemotherapy. Both patients survived more than 50 years. So started a career in what we now call medical oncology during which he pioneered approaches we now take for granted.

His team developed the first radioimmunoassay for hCG at Charing Cross Hospital. It was used to provide a national scale screening service for women following hydatidiform mole and for trophoblastic tumours in both sexes. Data collection allowed the stratification by predicted risk of drug resistance so that low risk patients were treated with methotrexate alone but those with risk of resistance received drug combinations. The introduction of etoposide in 1975 improved the success rate from around 65% to >90%.

For this disease he found solutions to the problems of case ascertainment, personalisation of therapy, monitoring of treatment and addressing drug resistance. The Medical Oncology unit at Charing Cross Hospital London has become the international lead for the management of trophoblastic diseases.

In developing the epitome of a centralized, specialised service for optimal treatment of an uncommon cancer Ken Bagshawe also gave thought to the development of medical oncology services for the wider community as Chair of a Government working party on Acute Cancer Services which reported in 1983. His thoughts at the time were published in an editorial*.

His work on methods of using antibody-enzyme conjugates to activate prodrugs selectively within tumours as a means of improving conventional chemotherapy was the topic of the very first Bagshawe Lecture which he delivered in 1989.

Ken Bagshawe died in his old teaching hospital, St Mary's on 27th December 2022 aged 97.

*J Roy Coll Phys London 1984; 18:153-4