Jeremy Swan

Jeremy Swan is best known for the development of the Swan-Ganz catheter but he also had other achievements to his name. He was born on June 1, 1922, to doctor parents in Sligo, Ireland. He entered St. Vincent’s College in Dublin at the age of 17 where, unfortunately, he developed meningitis. He was saved by the use of sulphonamides – antibiotics had not been discovered as yet.

He graduated in medicine from the University of London and then joined the Royal Air Force serving as a doctor in a hospital in Iraq. On returning to London he received his PhD from the University. He and Dr. Henry Bancroft published a lot of papers on human vascular response to sympathomimetic drugs, which received a lot of acclaim.

In 1951 he went on a Fellowship to work in the U.S.A. with Dr. Earl Wood. The latter was one of the leading cardiac physiologists of his day. Being extremely interested in the working and functioning of the human heart and especially congenital heart defects, Swan published his classic “Pulmonary hypertension in congenital heart disease.” He and Wood used indocyanine green for the measurement of cardiac output and detection of intracardiac shunts.

As his work at the Mayo Clinic became increasingly well-known he was offered many positions in other institutions. He chose the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital to be the chief of cardiology there, a position he held for 22 years. He had been invited to this position by Dr. Eliot Corday.

In 1968, along with Ganz he invented the pulmonary artery balloon catheter that could measure cardiac output and pulmonary capillary pressures. This brought them great fame as the procedure had completely revolutionised cardiac care.

He had many honours bestowed on him. They included being President of the American College of Cardiology in 1973. He was also awarded the Distinguished Fellow in 1985, Distinguished Scientific Achievement in 2003, the Walter Dixon Memorial Award of the British Medical Association, the Maimonides Award of the State of Israel, the Herrick Award for Outstanding Achievement in Clinical Cardiology from the American Heart Association. Perhaps, the award he treasured the most was the honorary doctorate he received from the Trinity College, Dublin.

He was responsible for training a host of younger doctors, among them being Sabu Rahimtoola and Kanu Chatterjee.

After retiring he moved to Pasadena and became a member of the Economic Round Table. The latter comprised a group of professionals and who met regularly to exchange intellectual material.

He had been married twice and had seven children from his first wife. In his youth he was a keen sportsman and had been an amateur middle-weight boxer.

In 2001 he suffered a stroke which left him physically incapacitated. He died on 7th February 2005 at the age of 82. On his death, Dr. Prediman K. Shah (Director, Cardiology Cedars Sinai Medical Centre) said, “The passing of Jeremy Swan represents the end of an era.”

Contributed by
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