Obituary

Major David Eilenberg,
MB BS Lond Univ, FRCP, FRCPsych, DPM, MRANZCP, FRANZCP

Formerly consultant psychiatrist at Wembley, Shenley and Northwick Park Hospitals, UK, Director of the Division of Psychiatry at Auckland Hospital, New Zealand

Eilenberg was an exceptionally able clinician with administrative ability and an intense interest in medical ethics. He seemed the right man for the psychiatric services at Northwick Park Hospital and their liaison with the Medical Research Council’s Clinical Research Centre when it opened in 1970. However, New Zealand attracted him more and he completed a successful career in Auckland, where he migrated in 1975.

Eilenberg was born in 1925 at Pitsea, Essex, the older of the two children of Sidney Eilenberg, a confectioner, and Annie Eilenberg, née Shube. Sidney Eilenberg came to England from Poland in 1915. His wife and her parents had arrived from Poland some years earlier. Major, a name deliberatively chosen by his father for its distinctiveness and which caused life-long confusion with the military rank, was educated at Hackney Downs School, a London County Council grammar school, formerly the Grocer’s Company’s School. The School’s alumni include Steven Berkoff, John Bloom, Michael Caine, Arnold Goodman and Harold Pinter, among many other notable men.

Eilenberg graduated MB BS (London) in 1948 from the London Hospital Medical School. After house officer appointments at the London Hospital, Eilenberg completed his National Service (1953–1955) in the Medical Branch of the Royal Air Force, serving in the Middle East with the rank of squadron leader. He then became registrar and senior registrar (1955–1961) at the Maudsley Hospital. The Maudsley was then the world’s leading postgraduate school of psychiatry. Eilenberg flourished. He published, as author or co-author, ten papers based on research conducted during his training, a remarkable achievement for a junior doctor. Notable were two papers, one a study of 1200 emergency psychiatric admissions over 1 year to St Francis’ Hospital Mental Observation Unit and the other a comparison of 1930 and 1955 admissions to Stamford House, a boys’ remand centre. Prominent in both are his interest in medical aspects of psychiatry and in the importance of administration in providing healthcare.

In 1956, showing an independence of thought, Eilenberg, a secular Jew, convened a meeting of fellow junior doctors where he proposed a motion of no confidence in Prime Minister Eden’s conduct of the Suez Crisis. The motion was carried and the news conveyed to Downing Street.

To broaden his experience Eilenberg spent 1961–1962 at the Mayo Clinic as a staff psychiatrist. From here he published three papers, one on liaison psychiatry which showed his developing interest in this specialty. He joined the Mayo Clinic Chapter of Sigma Xi, a society dedicated to promoting integrity in science and engineering.

Eilenberg returned to England to be consultant psychiatrist at Wembley Hospital (1963–1970) and then Shenley and Northwick Park Hospitals (1970–1974). Northwick Park Hospital was established in 1970 jointly by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the National Health Service (NHS) to provide for clinical research. Here Eilenberg became a key figure in establishing the new NHS psychiatric service and ensuring its cooperation with the MRC Clinical Research Centre where T. J. Crow was appointed head of the division of psychiatry.

Such was Eilenberg’s stature that he became chairman of the Ethical Committee for Northwick Park Hospital, a committee which played a key role in facilitating clinical research across all disciplines. A BMJ-sponsored discussion on the ethics of clinical research between L. J. Witts, Nuffield Professor of Medicine at Oxford, R. Williams, director of liver research at King’s College Hospital and Eilenberg, shows Eilenberg’s grasp of the principle issues. Essentially, he argued for promoting a culture of ethical concern among all professions involved in clinical research.

In 1974, to the astonishment of his colleagues, Eilenberg said he and his family were moving to Auckland, New Zealand, as he put it, ‘to go back 50 years in time’. He became Director of the Division of Psychiatry at Auckland Hospital in 1975. His superior clinical ability, grasp of medical administration and mentorship of younger men were appreciated. And his advice on psychiatric aspects of medical and especially neurological illness was sought after. He retired from his hospital post in 1985 to work part time in the Geriatric Unit at Auckland Hospital as a valued liaison psychiatrist until 2002. He also had a private consulting practice at the Bexley Clinic in Auckland where he continued until 2008.

He died in February 2012. After his death a colleague remarked: ‘He made an enormous contribution to Auckland psychiatry in the formal training of young psychiatrists and as a role model for new consultants, encouraging participation in administration, service delivery and negotiation with management’.

Eilenberg’s chief interest, outside his family, was golf, with a fairly average handicap. His regret was not to have come to Auckland 10 years earlier.

Eilenberg married in 1955 Elizabeth Joan Rothwell, a Senior Charge Nurse at the London Hospital and daughter of Frederick Rothwell, sometime Vicar of Denmead, Hants. He is survived by Elizabeth and their two sons, Richard, a dentist, and Philip, an accountant, both in Auckland. Their third child, Nigel, died in 2011.

Brian Barraclough
brian.barraclough@xtra.co.nz
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John Pippard was a consultant psychiatrist at Claybury Hospital, Essex, and a fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He trained initially to become a physician at the London Hospital, qualifying in 1942 and then gaining MRCP in the same year. After completing his house jobs at the London Hospital, he served in the Royal Army Medical Corps in north Africa and Italy, before taking charge of the Medical Division of the British General Hospital in Klagenfurt, Austria. There he met and married Kathleen, also a doctor, in 1947. John trained to be a doctor at Cambridge and the London Hospital, qualifying in 1947.

At the end of his time at Claybury he worked briefly with patients with intellectual disability at Leytonstone House. He retired in 1979. He was made FRCP in 1966 and became FRCPsych (Foundation) in 1972. After his retirement he became a research fellow for the Royal College of Psychiatrists. There he made an important national survey of the use of ECT in the UK, published in 1981 as ‘Electro-convulsive treatment in Great Britain’. This report highlighted inadequate practice of ECT in many places and led to major changes that John documented in a subsequent audit in 1991. He was also a Commissioner for the Mental Health Act Commission (1983–1986).

In retirement he stayed very active, enjoying looking after the large garden of his beautiful Regency house in Woodford, where he and his wife happily entertained friends and colleagues. He was a keen amateur musician and continued to play the cello well on into his 80s. John had a cheerful and optimistic disposition and when for reasons of physical frailty he had to move into a residential home he quickly adapted to this new environment: he spent the last two years of his life contentedly at Quaker House, where he was near his daughter and where he soon made new friends. He was predeceased by Kathleen, who was a family planning doctor, in 2005 and he leaves four children and nine grandchildren, of whom he was very proud.

Leonard Fagin & Peter Shoenberg

Norman Kreitman

Formerly psychiatrist and suicide expert

Norman Kreitman was an urbane and cultured man; a psychiatrist, philosopher and poet. He strode the world stage as a suicide researcher, winning the Distinguished Research Award from the American Society for Suicidology in 1987. At this time he was Director of the Medical Research Council (MRC) Unit for Epidemiological Psychiatry in Edinburgh, where he oversaw research into suicide, depression in women and alcohol consumption. He is the person who coined the term ‘parasuicide’, a recognition, myself and I acknowledge the dereliction. The conditions I was working in were, as you know, very different from what you have to cope with. I had no training in psychotherapy and flew by the seat of my pants. I did not find reading about psychotherapy or groups particularly helpful – if anything it interfered in my spontaneity! As I read your paper I became painfully aware of many of my shortcomings and missed opportunities. However, I did not try and teach systematically but hoped that staff and patients would absorb something useful from participating in the community. Claybury in the 50s and 60s was a great place to work and evidently involved and inspired a great many people who took their experience all over the world. I’m glad I was part of the Adventure in Psychiatry.’

At the end of his time at Claybury he worked briefly with patients with intellectual disability at Leytonstone House.

Leonard Fagin & Peter Shoenberg

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182
not acknowledged at the time, that most episodes of self-harm are not attempts at suicide.

A Londoner by birth, Norman qualified as a doctor in 1950 from the University of London. He worked in medicine at the Metropolitan Hospital in London and spent time as a researcher at the Forlanni Institute in Rome, Italy, before finally deciding on a career in psychiatry, training at the Maudsley Hospital in London. In 1971, he moved to Edinburgh, where he lived for the rest of his life. He was Foundation Editor of Social Psychiatry during this time. He retired from the MRC Unit when it closed in 1990.

Unlike many academics who, on retirement, continue in other academic or clinical posts, Norman put psychiatry behind him and with great ease. Instead, he turned to his lifelong interests in poetry and philosophy. He immersed himself in this creative work, publishing four volumes of poetry and a number of academic papers in philosophy journals. He was a very keen fisherman and remained so until shortly before his death. He took part in the Edinburgh International Festival with great gusto and would be seen at morning concerts in various venues, while the Usher Hall was his evening haunt. Conversation with Norman was always stimulating but he too was a wonderful listener, perhaps influenced by his interest in psychotherapy.

Norman was a willing supervisor to those of us whom he mentored, yet he never reprimanded or chastised. His capacity for clear thinking around methodological problems in research was a tool he used to great effect when guiding us in our projects. Even before it was acceptable in those aspiring to high academia, he understood that some of his researchers should, at times, work from home if family required this.

His wife Susan was his great companion and they were warm hosts to a stream of doctors and other mental health researchers working in the MRC Unit, whom they entertained in their home. As the years went by, Norman and Susan became very regular hosts to my family, with Norman advising my son as he wrote his Master’s dissertation. Two of Norman’s papers, published in Metaphilosophy in 2011, are cited in it.

The onset of cancer a number of years ago did not curtail Norman’s cultural activities and he continued to attend concerts and to write. Norman died at his home on 15 December 2012 at the age of 85 surrounded by his loving family. He is survived by his wife Susan, two children, Julia and Matthew, and four grandchildren. He will be deeply missed by all of us who had the great privilege of knowing him.

And tomorrow night the forms will return
As always, when they and this ageing man
Honour once more the cherished youth
Who strode through halls, could run upstairs.1


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