

## **Dorset County Hospital / West Dorset Dermatology – a recent history**

By Saleem Taibjee, Consultant Dermatologist (October 2020)

Niels Jensen started as Consultant Dermatologist in approximately 1974. His predecessor was Dr Hall. Niels did various clinics in West Dorset, at Dorset County Hospital (DCH, Dorchester), Weymouth, Blandford and Shaftesbury but was based in Bournemouth and Poole. His counterpart was Peter Goodwin who covered Bournemouth and Poole and Royal South Hants. Inpatient beds were at the Royal National Hospital in Bournemouth (6 beds), a new PUVA unit and a small minor ops facility. There were also 2 additional beds at Poole General Hospital if needed. In West Dorset beds were made available if needed under the general physicians at the old DCH on Princess Street (on its subsequent closure in the 1990s, it was re-opened as Benjamin Ferrey House; private apartments). Paediatric beds were made available at the children's unit at DCH under the care of the paediatricians if needed. Niels would visit West Dorset twice/week with his SHO often in tow. The first week he would cover Shaftesbury, Blandford and Dorchester. The second week he would visit Weymouth and Dorchester. In 1987 Niels cut down his West Dorset commitment and Richard Meyrick Thomas was appointed to both DCH and Salisbury. When Richard arrived, Niels kept on doing Weymouth and Richard took over the Blandford and Shaftesbury clinics (but Shaftesbury had transferred to Salisbury so it counted as part of Richard's Salisbury component; Bridport didn't have a clinic pre-1987). (In those days 12-14 new and up to 10 old patients were booked per clinic!). Niels retired in about 1994 and Colin Buckley (who was a registrar at Southampton) was appointed full time doing clinics in DCH and Weymouth. He subsequently moved to Waterford in Ireland (his father was a Dermatologist in Cork, Ireland, so Colin was effectively 'returning home'). Professor John Burton, who had retired from Bristol came and did a locum consultant fill-in for a couple of years until Simon Tucker was appointed in about 1997. Simon was married to a GP (Alison) and had 2 young children.

Work on a new county hospital was due to begin in 1968, but was postponed by the Wessex Regional Hospital Board. Construction of the first phase finally took place in the late 1980s, and originally referred to as West Dorset General Hospital to differentiate it from the old Dorset County Hospital which was still

in operation. The second phase was constructed in the mid-1990s, at which point all services including Dermatology were transferred across. The new Dorset County Hospital was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II on 8 May 1998.

At that time, Richard continued to do clinics at DCH, fortnightly clinics at Bridport and Blandford Hospitals and a monthly clinic at Swanage Health Centre. Simon took on clinics at DCH, Weymouth, Blandford and Bridport. Richard left in 2001 to become Clinical Director for Medicine at Salisbury and increase his clinical commitment there and was replaced in Dorchester by David Burden-Jones. David came to the UK to share his roots with his family including 3 children, his family had moved to Australia from England when he was 11.

In the meantime Cecilia Grossmith returned to her native Dorset and started as a Clinical Assistant in 2001. Cecilia did skin cancer/ solar damage work only, mostly follow ups. She recalls that patients with skin cancer were automatically followed up as follows; Melanoma patients for 10 years, SCC for 5 years and BCC 3 years. A doctor might see 28 patients per clinic, for 5 mins each!

Tim Harley (GP) was a Clinical Assistant during the early/mid 1990s but had to give up when Bere Regis practice became more demanding. He was able to resume Dermatology work at Poole Hospital in 2003/4, and transferred to DCH in 2006.

During much of this period there was just one dermatology nurse, Marilyn, who had been a linchpin of the department for decades and mostly phototherapy and anything else required e.g. patch testing, etc. Apparently she often started at 6am, and certainly by 7am. There was an excellent senior secretary, Maureen Tizard, who effectively ran the dept and was a fountain of knowledge. She may have had a computer, but the doctors certainly didn't!

During this time, there were no biologics of course and very few patients on systemic agents. There was an inpatient Dermatology bed allocation, a bath within the dept, occasional patients attending for daily administered coal-tar treatments.

In 2002 the fashion for GPs with a Specialist Interest (GPwSI) started, and Cecilia Grossmith was appointed by the PCT as a GPwSI in Weymouth Community Hospital, supported by the DCH team. Cecilia was later promoted to Associate Specialist in 2008.

It was about then that MDT meetings were introduced to discuss mostly biopsies of rashes that needed clinical correlation. Cecilia recalls being paid extra to attend for lunch and with sandwiches and coffee provided!

David was interested in research and did a study on the emotional consequences of a skin cancer diagnosis. He had a quiet authority about him and was a good teacher, he was also on the examination board at Bristol. At that time the dept had Bristol medical students in clinics regularly and the clinicians were honorary lecturers to the university. David returned to Brisbane, Australia in 2010 where he had previously worked for many years. His daughter, Megan, studied further in the UK and married the son of one of the local GPs (Stephen Scott).

Simon also emigrated to Australia (Cairns) at much the same time, leaving a severely depleted dept lacking substantive consultants. Referrals were restricted to skin cancer only. Poole Hospital picked up the rest. Cecilia started going to Bridport all day once a month, and Blandford was left to Larry Burke (GPwSI).

This was an extremely challenging few years in the dept with the hiatus of substantive consultants. There were various locums, a planned take-over by Poole that didn't materialise. The nursing staff were crucial to the survival of the dept. Barbara Burgess became the senior nurse/ skin cancer nurse and although she left in 2011, she was persuaded to return. She was supported by Ann Kirby. Tess Thomas took on the role of Skin Cancer Nurse Specialist. Barbara, as well as Tim Harley, retired in early 2018, and Ann left the dept later that year. The secretaries during this period included Jenny Ferreira, who retired in 2015, and Heather Durrant, who now continues as secretarial team leader.

In 2013, DCH indicated its commitment to re-invigorating the Dermatology service, and recruited 3 new substantive consultants, Saleem Taibjee, Dimitra Koch and Jibu Varghese. Saleem's post is split approximately 50:50 with Dermatopathology, as one of the few UK Dermatologists reporting

histopathology possessing the RCPATH Diploma in Dermatopathology. This was a period of relative stability. Jibu left in 2017 to pursue private practice and skin surgery in Salisbury. Eliseo Martinez briefly joined the dept as a locum consultant from Malaga, Spain, but returned within a year when a rare permanent position came up in his home region in Spain. At that point Marina Subnikova (originally from Latvia) joined as a locum consultant. She remains in the team and is being supported with a CESR application. Cecilia Grossmith retired in 2019, but continues to do occasional clinics at DCH, as well as support the Community Dermatology service. Alvin Lee joined from Kings College Hospital in late 2019 for a part time consultant position which included Dermatopathology training sessions. Alvin has recently relocated to Rugby to be closer to his family during COVID-19, and the hospital has advertised for a new consultant.

#### Acknowledgements

With thanks to Richard Meyrick Thomas, Tim Harley and Cecilia Grossmith for providing much of this information.