

# OBITUARY



A L Cochrane

A L COCHRANE  
CBE, FRCP, FFCM

Professor A L Cochrane, who had been director of the Medical Research Council's epidemiology unit in Cardiff and was the first president of the Faculty of Community Medicine, died on 18 June.

Archibald Leman—Archie—was born on 12 January 1909 in Galashiels. He won scholarships, first to Uppingham and then to King's College, Cambridge, where he obtained a first in both parts of the natural science tripos. He graduated MB, BCH late (in 1938) after studying at University College Hospital, London. At first, like many of his generation, he was bemused by Freud and Marx. Unlike most of them he spent a year as a medical student with the International Brigade during the Spanish civil war and started a training analysis in Vienna. Unconvinced by either experience he returned to medical research and then joined the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1940. He was captured in Crete in 1941 (an event that he usually blamed on Evelyn Waugh, the intelligence officer of D Battalion "Layforce") and spent four years as a prisoner of war in Crete, Greece, and Germany, treating chiefly Soviet, French, and Yugoslav prisoners with tuberculosis. In 1945 he was awarded the MBE for his services as a prisoner of war medical officer.

In 1946 he was given a Rockefeller fellowship, which enabled him to take the DPH at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and spent a year in the United States studying the epidemiology of tuberculosis. On his return he joined the MRC's pneumoconiosis research unit, which had just been set up, as epidemiologist and x ray film reader. There the next 10 years were probably the most productive of his life. With an almost obsessional interest in reproducibility, low rates of refusal, and validation he showed that measurements could be made on populations defined geographically with about the same known inaccuracy as measurements made in laboratories. This helped to make epidemiology a quantitative science but had many other results, notably in pneumoconiosis among coalminers and the epidemiology of bronchitis, anaemia, and rheumatoid arthritis and, later, health service research. In 1957 he survived a professor of surgery's prognosis that he had only three months to live.

He was, possibly unnecessarily, upset by the MRC's decision to hand over research on pneumoconiosis among coalworkers to the National Coal Board with limited participation from the MRC and finally became David Davies professor of chest diseases at the Welsh National School of Medicine and honorary director of the MRC's epidemiology unit. He was not a real success as a professor, either as a teacher or on the senate, though his kindness to students was proverbial, but it gave him a sort of breathing space to switch the direction of his research from epidemiology to health services research. He managed to break through by his evaluation of screening procedures (for glaucoma and anaemia).

He retired as a professor in 1969 to become a full time MRC director, in this second productive period emphasising the importance of discovering, by means of randomised clinical trials, the optimum place of treatment and the optimum length of stay. In 1971 the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust published his book *Effectiveness and Efficiency: random reflections on health services*, which, although undoubtedly lucky in

its timing, had a widespread international effect. At the same time he accepted the job of being the first president of the Faculty of Community Medicine. It was rather out of character: he did it in a crisis out of a sense of duty, but it upset his research plans. He managed a difficult important job with competence and achieved what was needed.

He retired to what looked like an Indian summer, living in a three generation household at Rhosce; he completed 20 year follow up studies of the communities he had studied in the 1950s, travelled widely, and studied the health services of developed countries. It did not work out as he hoped, but he continued his research work after some severe setbacks, completing a 30 year follow up study of men in Rhondda in 1983.

He had many other interests and abilities at different ages. He showed above average competence at rugby football, squash, tennis, and skiing and enjoyed collecting pictures and sculptures and gardening. A small volume of his verse exists, written while he was a prisoner of war. He entertained generously, particularly foreign visitors, and always admitted the value of a private income in helping his career.

Another aspect of his life was the support he gave his unfortunate family, chiefly by diagnosis and seeing that they got the best treatment and care. There were 11 in his immediate family: three had porphyria, three severe diabetes, and one juvenile rheumatoid arthritis.

He was a man with severe porphyria who smoked too much and was without the consolation of a wife, a religious belief, or a merit award—but he didn't do so badly.—ALC.