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**OBITUARY****Emeritus Professor Sir Donald Ward Beaven, KNZM, CME, MBChB, DSc (Hon) (Cantab), FRCP (London), FRCP (Ed), FRACP, FACP (Hon), 31 August 1924–4 November 2009**

With the tragic death of Sir Donald Beaven in a house fire at his Bank Peninsula, New Zealand holiday home, the dietetic profession lost a valuable friend and staunch advocate. Throughout his long and distinguished medical career—Sir Don, known affectionately as ‘Prof’, made a considerable contribution to the health of New Zealanders as a clinician, researcher, educator, international authority of diabetes and a tireless advocate across the political spectrum for improved health services for all citizens.

Sir Don began his clinical and academic career in Christchurch after gaining his medical qualifications at University of Otago in 1948, and in London in the early 1950s. On his return in 1955, he joined the North Canterbury Hospital Board as Senior Physician as well as Clinical Tutor for the University of Otago. With the assistance of Fulbright and Lilley Foundation Fellowships, Sir Don undertook research studies at Harvard University in 1958–1959. When the Medical Unit was established at the Princess Margaret Hospital in 1960, he was appointed Director of Medical Teaching and Research with the position of Senior Lecturer in medicine at University of Otago. The period 1960–1971 was a busy time when research included diabetes, endocrinological diseases and obesity, particularly morbid obesity. To obtain blood values for normal endocrine functions, the staff volunteered as research participants. It was a common occurrence for them to go to work fasting and give blood samples. The Unit was a comprehensive multidisciplinary team, including dietitians. Many recall the weekly clinical meetings with case study presentations and active discussion led by Sir Don in which all were welcome and expected to comment. The student and staff dietitians in 1966–1967 remember the ‘Rangiora Survey of Diabetes Mellitus in European New Zealanders’ when they spent weekends in Rangiora assisting with collecting dietary information and measuring heights and weights of the 2500 adult subjects.

With the opening of the University of Otago School of Medicine in Christchurch in 1971, Sir Don was appointed the foundation of Professor of Medicine, a position held until his retirement in 1989. Alongside his work as Senior Physician at Christchurch Hospital in the 1950s, Sir Don encouraged and supported the formation of the Christchurch Diabetes Society, a lay group for people with diabetes. Later, this group it worked with the Research Unit on the Rangiora Survey. He was the instigator of many things especially the

promotion of the idea for a Diabetes Centre located in a ‘non-clinical’ setting accessible to the community. This came to fruition in 1977 when, with the rent guaranteed by the Society and a Hospital Board community grant, premises were secured. At his insistence, the Society was on the Diabetes Management Committee thus ensuring a successful collaboration between a voluntary organisation and health professionals. This opened the way for the first Community Dietitian position in Christchurch based in the Diabetes Centre. There was a strong multidisciplinary approach with encouragement to understand each other’s roles. Referring to patients as ‘diabetics’ was forbidden—they were ‘people with diabetes’.

In 1977, Sir Don was a founding member of the New Zealand Society for the Study of Diabetes (NZSSD). Although the Diabetes Society has provided the platform for education and guidance of people with diabetes, NZSSD has been the forum for professional development for the various health occupations, including dietitians. During the 1970s, he was a member of the New Zealand Dietitians Board and served as an examiner for the Nutrition and Diet Therapy paper in the State Examination for Dietitians. He was also a member of the Board of Health Committee on the Dietetic Profession being a valuable contributor to its recommendations published in 1973. The principal of these led to the revision of the dietetic training curriculum and the development of the Postgraduate Diploma in Dietetics at University of Otago.

Sir Don was an Associate Member of the New Zealand Dietetic Association (NZDA), was a frequent speaker at conferences as well as author of several journal papers. In 1970, he delivered the second Constance Shearer lecture, ‘Detection, Deficiencies and Diets in Diabetes Mellitus’ in which he concluded, ‘Many of the solutions to our interrelated national health disorders of obesity, atheroma and diabetes can only be solved by the adequate recruitment of dietitians interested in the experimental side of nutritional science.’<sup>11</sup> He was made an Honorary Life Member of the NZDA in 1994 in recognition of his significant contributions to the dietetic profession over nearly 40 years.

Sir Don was an elected member of the North Canterbury Hospital Board and its successors from 1974 to 1991, latterly as Chairman of the Canterbury Area Health Board. During the health reforms of the 1990s, he was Deputy Commissioner

from 1991 to 1994. In the later years of his academic career, Sir Don joined the Department of Communication Disorders, University of Canterbury as Adjunct Professor. He continued to be active as Co-Patron of Diabetes New Zealand advocating to improve access to services for people with diabetes. He firmly believed in consumers having a say, rather than just health professionals speaking for them. Sir Don was the recipient of many honours including the conferment of an honorary DSc by University of Canterbury for his academic prowess, teaching and leadership, community services and enthusiasm. He was knighted for his services to medical education and pioneering developments in diabetes care in 2009.

Sir Don was a wonderful friend to the dietetics profession who recognised the importance of food and nutrition in the health of New Zealanders. He strongly advocated for the

inclusion of dietitians in clinical, community, educational and research roles in the health sector. He encouraged continuing education to maintain these roles. He was a gentleman who respected others, who saw the best in people and treated them as equals. The recurring theme at his memorial service was his passion and polite yet persistent way of making his point. The dietetic profession is a benefactor of Sir Donald's intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm.

Bernice E. Kelly, MS (Kansas State)

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## REFERENCE

- 1 Beaven DW. Constance Shearer lecture, detection, deficiencies and diets in diabetes mellitus. *JNZDA* 1970; **24**: 2.