Ian Douglas Ronayne

1920–2013; MBChB (NZ), FRCOG, FRANZCOG

Ian Ronayne, one of the earliest Residents at National Women’s Hospital, and later one of its Visiting Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, died recently, aged 93.

He was born in Wellington. He concluded his secondary education at Mt Albert Grammar School where he was a member of the Cricket First XI and the swimming team.

He graduated from Otago Medical School in 1947. During the war he served as a reservist in the Medical School Army Corps, spending a holiday on the Auckland Islands searching for enemy submarines and counting albatrosses!

Following house surgeon years in Auckland Hospital he spent two and a half years as a Registrar at the Cornwall (later National Women’s) Hospital Obstetric and Gynaecological Unit.

When he left to pursue his postgraduate studies in Britain, the senior medical staff gave him an Omega watch.

On arrival in London, in 1953, he contacted the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists seeking assistance in obtaining a training position. To his surprise, that same evening, he was phoned by Mr Joe Wrigley (of forceps fame) offering him an immediate position at St Thomas’s Hospital. This included duties at the old General Lying In Hospital, one of London’s oldest maternity units. Later he moved to St Luke’s Hospital in Guildford as a registrar, working with his friend and surgical colleague, Keith Ewen, later to be his best man. While in Guildford he met his future wife, Veronica—a ward sister.

Ian passed his MRCOG in 1956, became a FRCOG in 1972 and a Foundation Fellow of the RNZCOG (later RANZCOG) in 1992.

He returned urgently to New Zealand in 1957 to take over the practice of Dr Fred Smale, Auckland’s busiest obstetrician at that time. He charged five guineas plus GMS for full obstetric care. He was soon appointed to a Visiting Obstetrician post at St Helen’s Hospital and became heavily involved in midwife training, once claiming ‘half the midwives in New Zealand were trained by me’. His contributions were marked by a plaque at the hospital.

Later he was appointed to a Visiting position on ‘B Team’ at National Women’s Hospital, working with Bruce Grieve, Bernie Kyle and Ron Elvidge in the gynaecology team. He had a close working relationship with Pat Dunn at the St Vincent’s Home for unmarried mothers whose babies were for adoption. They
delivered over 2000 babies. Pat became a Papal Knight, and Ian received a Papal Apostolic Blessing with its ‘pledge of heavenly favours’. Ian also worked with Pat Dunn in the Diabetic Clinic at National Women’s Hospital, co-authoring a 1983 paper ‘Fructosamine in Diabetic Pregnancy’, in The Lancet.

Ian was a practical, no-nonsense specialist: countless Residents enjoyed his forthright opinions. He was possibly the most conscientious obstetrician and gynaecologist of his era—refusing to take a holiday when any of his obstetric patients was due. He was immensely proud of his association with the Postgraduate Department, then in its heyday of research achievements.

He shared a clinic with Bill McIndoe, and more than anyone, provided friendship and support in the years Bill was battling the ‘Unfortunate Experiment’.

Ian’s move into retirement was gradual and he finally gave up practice in 1990. His diminishing workload gave him more time for leisure activities. Family issues to one side, his principal interest was golf at the Akarana Golf Club where, at an earlier time, he played off a handicap of 8.

We extend our sympathy to his three children (Richard, Clare and Felicity) who were at his bedside when he died.

Ron Jones wrote this obituary.