

Thomas Fitzpatrick

Died 16.08.2003, Massachusetts

Thomas B Fitzpatrick MD, PhD, died aged 83 years on the 16th August 2003 at his home in Massachusetts. During a long career he was an outstanding researcher, clinician and medical educator who made many original contributions to dermatology. Tom graduated in medicine from Harvard Medical School and later obtained his PhD from the University of Minnesota and was a fellow at the Mayo Clinic. He served in the United States Army Chemical Centre where he worked with Aaron Lerner, who was later to become head of the department of dermatology at Yale and with whom he had a lifelong friendship and a shared interest in pigment cell research.

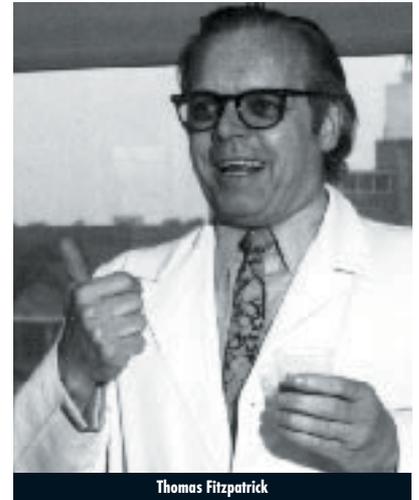
After serving as professor of dermatology at the University of Oregon he was appointed, at the early age of 39, as Edward Wigglesworth professor and head of the department of dermatology at Harvard Medical School. He soon attracted a number of talented research workers to the department of dermatology at the Massachusetts General Hospital which became one of the leading centres of investigative dermatology in the United States. He encouraged the development of photobiology in relation to the skin and the use of the electron microscope as an investigative tool in dermatology. A strong link was established with the department of pathology.

I first met Tom in 1964 when he gave the Prosser White oration in London on mammalian melanin biosynthesis. This talk was a revelation to me for it was apparent that here was a clinician who was also a scientist and at the forefront of research in pigment cell biology. He invited me that evening to come as a research fellow at Harvard Medical

School where I later had a most fruitful and stimulating year at the Mass. General. As Chief he seemed to be very busy, but he always found time to discuss problems, answer questions and lend encouragement for research. He was an excellent model for a head of department, particularly in furthering the careers of those who worked with him. He took immense pride in the number of his residents and fellows who later became heads of departments of dermatology in the United States and around the world.

It was during the time that he spent at Oxford University as a Commonwealth Fund Fellow that he, together with several collaborators, established that the melanosome was the basic subcellular organelle of pigmentation. While at Oxford he made friends with many British dermatologists, in particular Alice Carleton, Renwick Vickers and Hugh Wallace. He also collaborated with a number of scientists including Aodan Breathnach and Michael Birbeck. He once told me that he was a great anglophile and always enjoyed his visits to the UK, particularly the science. However he also admitted he was very flattered by the honours that he received in Japan. In 1987 he was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun for his work in training Japanese Dermatologists.

Throughout his career he was an active clinician with interests in pigmentary disorders, skin cancers and in particular malignant melanoma. He was a pioneer, with colleagues, on oral psoralen photochemotherapy (PUVA) for vitiligo and later in the treatment of psoriasis. Even after retiring as head of the department at Harvard he continued in busy clinical practice. He



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had over 250 scientific publications and received many honours and awards. In addition to being an honorary overseas member of our BAD he was a member of many foreign dermatological societies. He was the recipient of the Master of Dermatology award of the American Academy of Dermatology in 1990 and gave the Sulzberger International Lecture in 1979. He was a past president of the Society of Investigative Dermatology and hosted the International Pigment Cell conference when it was held in Cambridge, Mass. in 1977. He was one of the founders of the Dermatology Foundation.

His greatest achievement was as Editor-in-chief of Dermatology in General Medicine. This textbook has been a great success worldwide and he himself regarded it as complementary to our own Rook book.

He is survived by his wife Bea, four children and three grandchildren, He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Professor S S Bleehen

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