



GRAHAM WRIGHT (05/03/1947 – 02/10/2023)
An active and tireless promoter of medical informatics

A sad news unexpectedly hit the international medical informatics community on Friday morning – “Graham Wright, IAHSI Treasurer, passed away today” (Feb. 10th).

Preparing to be a nurse tutor, he took in the early 80s a module in computer programming, which changed his life. As a nurse tutor at Warrington General Hospital, he set up a “computer club” and, as early as 1982 a small library of teaching programs was set up, followed by the formation of the OSL – Open Software Library. Fully aware of the essential role of education in the assimilation of new technologies, he (OSL) ran two major conferences on the “Use of Computers in Health Care Education and Training”, in 1986 and 1988, with a published volume recognized as a milestone in medical informatics education papers.

An important period of his career was the one at the Centre for Health Informatics at HSMU, University of Manchester (1987) and at GCL Healthcare Consultants (1990) as Senior Managing Consultant, heading the Education and Training division. In that period, the most widely used product in the area was the Rainbow Pack “Using Information in the Management of the Nursing Resource”, which was commissioned by the NHS Management Executive.

His visibility at a European scale was triggered by his involvement, together with Jean Roberts in the IT EDUCTRA (Information Technologies EDUCation and TRaining) project (4th Framework Programme of the European Commission), developed by John Mantas and Arie Hasman and started in 1995. Supporting the new trends in Eastern Europe was implicitly included and a BCS delegation came a couple of times to Romania (including him and his spouse, Helen Betts) to assist and advise high level officials in planning a well-structured national health information system.

As he confessed later, his experience of noticing the difference between various views, cultural heritage and socio-political constraints, made a major contribution to the development of the “Three Domains Needing an ‘Effective Fit’” – Clinical Work / Information and Communication Technologies / Organization of medicine and healthcare system. This led to the development of a MSc in Health Informatics by Manchester University, Surrey University and University of Rotterdam.

A beloved achievement was CHIRAD – the Centre for Health Informatics Research and Development, an academic institutional member of IMIA and EFMI. At a personal level he became active in Open Source technologies in healthcare at both EFMI and IMIA. In 2007 he led the development of the IMIA Knowledge Base.

The launching of a Master’s Degree in Health Informatics validated by the University of Winchester, attracted a cohort from the Walter Sisulu University (WSU) of Mthatha, South Africa, to be taught in Mthatha in weekly blocks every 3 months. This led to Graham considering applying for a research Champion post in WSU and relocating to South Africa with Helen.

After leaving Winchester and moving to South Africa in 2009 he became chair of Health Sciences Research, Walter Sisulu University (2009). He was active in supporting academic staff in their research and also medics who had to undertake small scale research in order to achieve a Master’s qualification that had become a requirement.

At the end of his 5 year contract he moved to Fort Hare University in East London, a lot nearer to home, where he took on a similar role. At the time of his death he held a visiting professorial post at Rhodes University in Grahamstown and was a Visiting Professor and Professor Extraordinarius at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

His professional activity had a wide recognition, as a Fellow of the BCS and IAHSI. He was recently elected as IMIA treasurer.

We shall always consider that his life was so harmonically complimented by a wonderful relationship with his wife – Helen Betts / Wright, sharing similar thoughts, professional interests and works. Dear Helen, may God give you strength to overcome these difficult moments!

His passing away is an enormous loss for the entire medical informatics community, but he has reserved a special box of love within the souls of all those who enjoyed his vivid spirit, sense of humor, deep friendship and readiness to help.

Good bye, dear friend!

Sincere condolences to the bereaved family!

George Mihalas – chair, IMIA History WG