

George R Tiller

US doctor who provided late abortions and was murdered

Dr George Tiller, one of only three US doctors who provided abortions late in pregnancy, was shot dead as he served as an usher in his church in Wichita, Kansas, on 31 May (*BMJ* 2009;338:b2237). At his funeral on 7 June, more than 800 people filled the sanctuary at the College Hill United Methodist Church while hundreds of others crowded into an overflow room or church hallways, including women whom he had treated. Police kept away a few antiabortion demonstrators. His wife, Jeanne, sang the Lord's Prayer and dedicated it to "my best buddy and the love of my life," according to the *New York Times* (www.nytimes.com, 7 June 2009, "Kansas doctor remembered as devoted to family and women").

Tiller was no stranger to violence. In 1993 he was shot in both arms; his assailant was convicted and imprisoned. In 1986 the clinic was bombed. Dr Tiller usually wore a flak jacket and drove an armour plated Jeep.

President Barack Obama said that he was "shocked and outraged" by the killing. The Planned Parenthood Federation, the National Partnership for Women and Families, the Guttmacher Institute, the Center for Reproductive Rights, the National Abortion Federation, Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health, NARAL Pro-Choice America, and other reproductive health groups expressed their sorrow at the killing.

Many antiabortion groups condemned the killing but maintained their antiabortion stance. Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, said, "George Tiller was a mass murderer. We grieve for him that he did not have time to prepare his soul to face God. I am more concerned that the Obama administration will use Tiller's killing to intimidate pro-lifers into surrendering our most effective rhetoric and actions. Abortion is still murder" (www.christiannewswire.com, 31 May 2009, "George Tiller was a mass murderer, says Randall Terry").

Scott Roeder, an antiabortion activist, is being held by police on a charge of first degree murder. The US Department of Justice has said that it will investigate Tiller's killing as a federal crime.

"Dr Tiller's murder means that abortion is now only available in Kansas in the Kansas City metro area, which is on the eastern edge of Kansas. Women who need abortion care will need to travel much longer distances, at greater expense and other costs, to obtain safe, professional care," said Peter Brownlie, head of Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri.

"He was assassinated, not murdered," said Warren Hern of Boulder, Colorado, his friend of more than 30 years. "This was a brutal, premeditated, cold blooded, political assassination," Dr Hern told the *BMJ*. Dr Hern runs one of only two clinics that offer women abortions late in pregnancy, as do a few hospitals that prefer not to be named. He has been threatened himself and said, "That's the whole point of terrorism, to kill you or ruin your life."

Dr Tiller "felt very strongly that women should have an option with a diagnosis of fetal disorder. It wasn't moral to offer that diagnosis without being able to do something about it. It was moral, ethical, and legal," Dr Hern told the *BMJ*. He said that the antiabortion movement has had a chilling effect on the pro-choice movement by limiting information to clinics and women.

The harassment Tiller faced "was worse than any other place. It was daily. It was horrible. He and his family were subjected to harassment all the time. They [the protestors] followed him home. They were terrified; they had four kids," Dr Hern said.

Dr Tiller was born in Wichita, the son of a doctor. He graduated from the University of Kansas Medical School in 1967 and became a flight surgeon with the US navy. He planned to become a dermatologist.

His life changed in 1970 when his parents, sister, and brother in law were killed in an aeroplane crash. According to Judy Thomas of the *Kansas City Star*, who coauthored a book, *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War*, he

returned to Wichita. He planned to take care of his elderly grandmother and his sister's child and close up his father's medical practice.

Then he discovered that his father had been providing abortions, which were then illegal in the United States, because of his guilt over the death of a woman he refused to help (www.kansas.com, 7 June 2009, "Life experiences shaped Tiller's career").

He decided to keep his father's practice open. More women seeking abortion sought him out. When abortion became legal in 1973

he began doing more abortions. In the mid-1980s he focused on performing more complicated late abortions.

Abortion is a politically divisive and even explosive issue in the United States. It led to the rise of the religious right wing, which supported George W Bush. Kansas became a battleground of the abortion wars.

The antiabortion group Operation Outreach moved its headquarters from California to Kansas. It protested almost daily outside Dr Tiller's clinic,

Women's Health Care Services. In 1991 Operation Outreach held more than six weeks of protest outside the clinic, with 2700 arrests of protesters. Operation Outreach had a "Tiller watch" on its website. Mainstream rightwing radio and television commentators referred to Tiller as "Tiller the baby killer."

Tiller also faced several court challenges. In March he was quickly acquitted of charges that a doctor who provided a required second opinion in abortions was not truly independent. The Kansas state licensing board immediately began moving forward with a disciplinary action involving the same charges (*BMJ* 2009;338:b1329).

Dr Tiller's family said that they are closing his clinic permanently. He leaves his wife, Jeanne, and four children.

Janice Hopkins Tanne

George R Tiller, doctor in Wichita, Kansas, US (b Wichita 1941; q University of Kansas School of Medicine 1967), died of a gunshot wound in Wichita on 31 May 2009.

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President Barack Obama was "shocked and outraged" by the killing of George Tiller

Alan Geoffrey Atkinson



Former general practitioner Norwich (b 1922; q Guy's Hospital, London, 1947), d 22 December 2008.

Alan Geoffrey Atkinson served in the Home Guard during 1941-4, and in the Royal Army Medical Corps 1947-9. His first wife, Audrey, died in 1949. On leaving the army, he took up a hospital post in Maidenhead, where he met Daphne, and they married in 1952. He became a partner in a small general practice in Norwich in 1955. Retiring early from general practice in 1977, he was then medical referee at St Faith's Crematorium in Norwich until his death. His hobby was building, which he first learnt at Taunton School in the 1930s. Predeceased by Daphne in 1998, he leaves a son from his first marriage, two daughters from his second, and five grandchildren.

Alan Atkinson

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John Collings-Wells



Former general practitioner Fleet, Hampshire (b 1922; q King's College, London, 1957), died from heart failure on 12 February 2009.

John Collings-Wells was born in Kenya. He was found to have a patent ductus arteriosus, so the family moved back to England. He trained as an aeronautical engineer with De Havilland's, and after the second world war worked for the Anglo-Iranian oil company in Abadan, Persia. In 1947 the ductus was closed, and John decided to train in medicine.

He was a general practitioner in Rugby during 1959-64 and in Fleet during 1966-79. After retiring in 1980 to Lymington, he worked in the rheumatology department at Southampton Hospital. He was also medical officer to the Jubilee Sailing Trust for many years. He leaves a wife, Heather; four children; and 10 grandchildren.

James Collings-Wells

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2009;338:b2444

Geoffrey Stanley Charles Hibbert



Former general practitioner Bromley (b 1927; q Middlesex Hospital London, 1970; MRCGP, DOBstRCOG), d 22 January 2008.

Geoffrey Stanley Charles Hibbert ("Geoff") qualified as a chartered quantity surveyor and practised in London. Aged 38, he changed careers, becoming a general practitioner in his home town and remaining there until his retirement. For many years he was the only GP obstetrician in Bromley, delivering babies at home and in hospital. A longstanding member of the local medical committee, he was also secretary and chairman of the Bromley division of the BMA, receiving the BMA badge of commendation. He was active in the Livery Committee of the Society of Apothecaries, and a member of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC). He leaves a wife, Heather.

Heather Hibbert, John McQueen

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2009;338:b2420

Allan Hulme

Former chief of neurosurgery Frenchay Hospital, Bristol (b 1917; q Cambridge/Manchester 1942; FRCS), d 29 December 2008.

In 1935 Allan Hulme won an exhibition at St John's College, Cambridge, to read agricultural science, switching to medicine in 1936. After qualifying, he joined the

Royal Army Medical Corps, serving in East Africa, India, and Burma. After demobilisation in 1946 he obtained a post in neurosurgery at Frenchay, becoming consultant in 1977. His 1960 paper on the surgical approach to thoracic intervertebral disc protrusions is still cited. And as chief of neurosurgery he performed pioneering research on the mechanisms of control of intracranial pressure during anaesthesia, after traumatic head injury, and before and after surgery for intracranial space-occupying lesions. Predeceased by his wife, Christine, in 2001, he leaves three children and four grandchildren.

Edward C Hulme

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2009;338:b2274

Frank Robert Cassels Manning

Former general practitioner Epsom (b 1917; q Guy's Hospital, London, 1941; MRCGP), d 2 May 2009. After qualification Frank Robert Cassels Manning joined Squadron 615 of the Royal Air Force—an association which stayed with him for life. After the second world war he studied urogenital surgery at Orpington Hospital before becoming a general practitioner in Epsom in 1947. He particularly enjoyed his connection with Epsom Cottage Hospital, and late in his working life became a trainer, taking the exam route to the MRCGP, which was then voluntary. After over 30 years in general practice he retired to Sussex and indulged his loves of gardening and cricket. He leaves a wife, Nan; three children; and two stepsons.

C J F Manning

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2009;338:b2446

George Davidson Scarrow

Former consultant radiologist and director of radiological studies Liverpool University (b 1918; q Liverpool 1941; MD, FRCR, MRad), d 11 March 2009. After qualification, George Davidson Scarrow joined the Royal Army Medical Corps and served in North West Europe, experiencing horrendous conditions. After the second world war he trained in



diagnostic radiology in Liverpool and was a consultant in the Liverpool area. A general radiologist, he performed neurological and vascular interventional techniques and later ultrasonography. In 1968 he was appointed part time director of studies and was responsible for extending the academic department of diagnostic radiology, a major training school today. A keen golfer and sailor, he leaves a wife, Ruth, and two daughters.

R W Galloway

Christopher Neville Watson

Former general practitioner Harwood and East Keswick, Leeds (b 1924; q Oxford 1950; MA), d 15 January 2009. After house appointments at Guy's Hospital, London, Christopher Neville Watson served five years as a surgeon lieutenant with the Royal Navy. The illness of his father, a senior physician at Leeds General Infirmary, prompted his return to Leeds, where he served for several years as a resident medical officer at the same hospital. In 1969 he entered general practice at Harwood and East Keswick, where he worked single handedly until his retirement in 1989. Outside his practice and his family, he was interested in cricket, cycling, and D'Oyly Carte. Predeceased by a daughter, he leaves a wife, Wendy, and a son.

Geoffrey Chandler, Myles Gibson

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