

OBITUARY

For Dr. Ian Johnston

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Sadly, Ian Johnston passed away on Monday, March 19.

Ian was above all – a friend. At this stage and from my side it seems to be impossible to mention all his curricula, success, honors, and awards of his breath-taking career. Ian was a pioneer in IVF, but most importantly he was an openhearted teacher.

I first met Ian and his team in 1980, when they were at the time the second in the world to successfully carry out an IVF-ET. In contrast to the pioneers Steptoe and Edwards, who were slow to provide others with all the necessary information to allow the repetition and further development of their techniques, Ian was very generous in inviting researchers and doctors from all over the globe to his laboratory. Together with his biologist Alex Lopata, who

only shortly previously had described the IVF techniques of the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne in "Fertility & Sterility," Ian openly discussed their experience. In the process one could easily say that he educated half the world in the application of IVF techniques. In 1980 in Melbourne I met numerous young doctors and researchers from Germany, France, the USA, Italy, Belgium, and other countries who started successful IVF programs after their visits and who are now preeminent in their field. For me the most important result of my visit, however, was the deep personal friendship between us, which developed over the years. I think I can speak for innumerable colleagues when I say that Ian was most generous in cultivating these friendships over the years, and that it was always a pleasure to meet him and his wife Chris at international conferences and private gatherings.

We were greatly dismayed when we learned about Ian's serious illness from himself, when he wrote on Dec. 5, 2000:

I thought I had better bring you up-to-date with the fact that I am now having a struggle with the big "C" and have had to retire from medicine. In doing so I would like to thank you for the long association I have enjoyed with you and for the many happy times we spent together both medically and socially. We have not always seen eye to eye about everything but that is immaterial. Good relationships survive those hiccoughs. You are a man of great energy and I know you will go from strength to strength. I trust your wife and the family are well. Please give her my love and would you also pass on my kind regards to my other friends in your territory whose company I have had the good fortune to enjoy. My very best wishes for the future. Kind regards, Ian Johnston.

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On Jan 30, 2001, I wrote back:

Dear Ian, Three days ago I have received an email from John McBain, I think it was "Australia Day." You have been awarded the Award of Member of the Order of Australia, which is indeed a great honor. I also understood from your letter of December 5, that you are seriously ill, and all our friends are desperate about these bad news, so am I. May I now take the opportunity, at the occasion of your award, to thank you for your friendship, and to express you my acknowledgement of your great importance in the past to support and teach people

from all over the world, to all who have a lifetime profit from your experience and your open-hearted friendship.

A few weeks later I received again a message from John MacBain, who had been Ian's student and worked for him for many years. It was the sad news of Ian's death. We should agree with John who wrote these words:

All involved in reproductive medicine should mourn his passing and celebrate his life.