



Obituary

Obituary: Professor Justin Charles Mason

‘Were a star quenched on high, For ages would its light,
Still travelling downward from the sky, Shine on our mortal sight.
So when a great man dies, For years beyond our ken,
The light he leaves behind him lies Upon the paths of men’.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Justin Charles Mason (7 January 1961–21 May 2022)

Justin Charles Mason, Professor of Vascular Rheumatology at Imperial College London and Honorary Consultant Physician at the Hammersmith Hospital died on 21 May 2022 at the age of 61 years. Professor Mason was a distinguished clinician scientist, a gifted leader and a friend to many.

Justin was born in 1961 in Aldershot, England. His father, Paul, was a renowned local general practitioner and his mother, Anne, a physiotherapist. Justin was an older sibling to sisters Rosalind and Lucinda (Bel) and was educated at Lambrook and later Sherborne, where he formed lifelong friendships. Justin was always a highly able scholar and sportsman, excelling in hockey, rugby and cricket. The family interest in medicine brought him to Charing Cross Medical School where he graduated MB BS with Honours in Pathology in 1986. He obtained First Class Honours for his intercalated BSc, during which he worked with Dr Patrick Venables, who helped him prepare his first manuscript. This was on the cross-reactivity of rheumatoid factors and was published in the *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases*. With this springboard, Justin obtained his House Physician post at Charing Cross under the Professor of Rheumatology, (now Sir) Ravinder Maini. After general medical training he was appointed Rheumatology Registrar at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School (RPMS) at the Hammersmith Hospital, where he would remain for many happy years until his untimely death. Rheumatology was thriving there, and Justin joined a vibrant clinical group with (now Sir) Mark Walport, Alex So, Dorian Haskard and Kevin Davies, among many others.

In 1992 Justin was awarded an MRC Training Fellowship to work under the supervision of Professor Haskard. These were the days when the actions of cytokines on vascular endothelium were first becoming apparent and Justin’s PhD explored how endothelial cells in skin might differ from the

commonly studied umbilical vein endothelial cells. This involved isolating and culturing microvascular endothelial cells, a considerable technical challenge at the time. For this and other seminal work on the vascular endothelium he won the Medical Research Society Young Investigator of the Year in 1996.

Now committed to a clinical academic track, Justin progressed through Arthritis Research Campaign (now Versus Arthritis) Fellowships at Imperial College, into which RPMS had been absorbed. His laboratory research became increasingly sophisticated, with an emphasis on understanding not just how the vasculature is activated at a molecular level to orchestrate an inflammatory response, but, of equal importance, how it can help maintain an anti-inflammatory homeostasis. In 2009, Imperial recognized his outstanding achievements by appointing him Professor of Vascular Rheumatology, perhaps the first such title.

Specializing in large vessel vasculitis was a natural fit for Justin, combining his deep knowledge of endothelial pathophysiology with an evolving interest in functional imaging and biologic treatments. Over two decades Justin built up a large cohort of patients and translational research experience, innovating clinical scoring methods and the use of cutting-edge imaging using novel molecular tracers and PET-CT to assess vascular inflammation. A high point in Justin’s career was being invited to give the Heberden Oration at the British Society for Rheumatology in Liverpool in May 2018. Justin delivered a tremendous oration in his usual modest manner. At the time of his death, Justin was Co-Head of the Cardiovascular Division at the National Heart and Lung Institute, Imperial College London, a senior role that he was thoroughly enjoying.

Justin also worked hard supporting patient charities (Vasculitis UK, PMR/GCA UK, Scleroderma & Raynaud’s UK), served on the British Society for Rheumatology Heberden Committee and had a long association with the British Heart Foundation, who funded much of his research and for whom Justin was the current Chair of their Project Grant Committee.

As a child, Justin dreamed of being a game warden in Africa. He never became one, but travelled there extensively, returning with beautiful photographs of wild animals and stunning landscapes. At home he inherited the familial passion for chalk-stream trout fishing, which, as with medicine, he took to a higher level. His interest in sport was lifelong and

he played for many years for the Spencer Hockey Club. He also kept ties with Sherborne as Vice President of the Sherbourne Pilgrims, the old boys sporting club.

Justin will be remembered not just as an outstanding clinical scientist and physician, but as someone who always generously gave his time, no matter how busy, to listen, to advise and to help. He was a solid senior presence with a wicked sense of humour, always sociable and always with a smile. He leaves a huge legacy that includes advances in vascular biology; the mentorship and training of innumerable clinical and non-clinical trainees and fellows; a better understanding of the cell and molecular bases of large vessel vasculitis; and, not least, many grateful patients. Justin will be greatly missed by a legion of friends and of course by his beloved family: his mother Anne, sister Bel, brother-in-law Jules and their children Alexander, Tom and Ella.

Funding

No specific funding was received from any bodies in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors to carry out the work described in this article.

Disclosure statement: The authors have declared no conflicts of interest.

Taryn Youngstein^{1,2,*}, Dorian Haskard²

¹Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, Hammersmith Hospital, London, UK

²National Heart and Lung Institute, Imperial College London, London, UK

*Correspondence to: Taryn Youngstein, Department of Rheumatology, Ham House, Hammersmith Hospital, Du Cane Road, London W12 0HS, UK. Email: t.youngstein@imperial.ac.uk