

In Memoriam: Dr. John David Spence

We regret to announce the passing of Dr. J. David Spence on August 10, 2025 at the age of 80 in London, ON.

Dr. Spence started his medical career at Western University, where he gained his medical degree in 1970. Having an intuitive interest in Neurological Disorders, he recognized early in his Neurology training at Western University that many strokes could be prevented by proper management of hypertension. After completing his residency in Neurology, he then completed a residency in Internal Medicine at Western and a Fellowship in Clinical Pharmacology at the Cardiovascular Research Institute, University of California at San Francisco to better serve his patients in a more comprehensive and personalized way. Even though he came to appreciate the good Californian wine, he returned to Western University to practice Medicine and Neurology and to build his career and life with his beloved wife, Ann, with whom they raised three sons and have been blessed with nine grandchildren who brought him endless joy.

At the time of his Neurology training, he met Dr. Henry Barnett who became his mentor. Dr. Barnett recognized early on Dr. Spence's potential after asking him a simple question: "Are you ambitious"? Dr. Spence's ambition was to offer the best stroke prevention care to his patients and spread his knowledge at a national and international level.



Dr. Spence always described himself as a “perpetual student” who could not rest until he gained the maximum possible depth of knowledge. His training in Clinical Pharmacology led him to develop a Hypertension Clinic with focus in stroke prevention that resulted in reducing the ischemic and hemorrhagic stroke burden in his catchment area by half after treating high blood pressure properly. At that time, he realized that large artery disease was the most prevalent etiology of ischemic strokes. As a result of this, he started his own carotid ultrasound lab to have proper clinical vascular assessment of patients and easier access to care. Being a “perpetual student”, he learned soon enough by his senior sonographer, Maria DiCicco that he could also measure atherosclerosis burden. He is now known as the “Father of Total Plaque Area Measurement” that we continue to use in clinical practice and treat our patients accordingly. At the time of his passing, he was still the Director of the Stroke Prevention and Atherosclerosis Research Centre that incorporated a clinically based ultrasound lab providing high quality carotid and transcranial ultrasounds and a research unit where he was still actively involved in clinical trials.

Dr. Spence demonstrated throughout his career academic excellence with a large number of publications that he authored. From 1977 to 2009 he was able to have continuous funding from the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Canada and several NIH grants, including the NASCET, ACAS and VISP trials. Since 1988, he had over \$20 million in funding, of which approximately half was peer-reviewed funding and half was contract research. He has been holding CIHR grants since 2008 including his research for the Canadian Atherosclerosis Imaging Network with Dr. Jean-Claude Tardif, Carotid imaging with MRI with Dr. Brian Rutt, 3D carotid ultrasound imaging with Dr. Aaron Fenster and the most recent and active CIHR grant regarding intestinal repopulation in patients with unexplained atherosclerosis with Dr. Gregory Gloor among other respected colleagues with experience in intestinal microbiome. He has authored 5 books in English, Czech and Portuguese and more than 500 peer-reviewed publications.

Dr. Spence was a charismatic leader who was recognized for his honesty, integrity, responsibility, transparency and accountability. Although he was mindful about counting his words, he did not avoid challenging and confronting his colleagues openly and honestly and, thus, creating the basis for future critical thinking and meaningful discussions. He had a great care and focus on good clinical outcomes and could not settle for what was “good enough” for others. He believed that the best physicians should also be the best researchers who continue to seek in depth the truth about each special clinical scenario. He focused on personalized medicine early on his career having the asset of training in Neurology and Stroke as well as in Medicine and Clinical Pharmacology.

In recognition of his work, he received more than 15 distinguished awards including the Order of Canada in 2019 and the William Feinberg Award for Excellence in Clinical Stroke in 2020.



He remained humbled about his achievements. Colleagues who have worked closely with Dr. Spence have always praised him for his superb intelligence. To those who met and worked with him, he certainly seemed to have a photographic memory, being able to recall biochemistry and anatomy from his early 20s to his late 70s as well as names and dates of important publications. He demonstrated great skills as a clinical and academic supervisor, being able to provide extensive academic counselling to his trainees with accurate evidence that he could recall and analyze better than any internet search engine. His research was able to fund a large number of research coordinators and students over the years, whom he inspired and mentored even after the end of their contract. Many of his mentees are now well-known leaders in Canada and abroad. In addition to his high academic standards, he is well known among his colleagues for his sharp personality and great sense of humour. He loved to participate in knowledge games, such as the Games of Strokes at the International Stroke Conferences in 2019 as well as taking the time to enjoy travelling with his family and remain physically active while golfing.



His loss has been mourned by many of his colleagues, friends and family and his life and academic contributions will continue to be honoured by his mentees.

With gratitude,

Dr. Chrysi Bogiatzi

Stroke Neurologist

On behalf of the Clinical Neurological Sciences, Western University, London, ON, Canada