

In Memoriam

Henry Jonathan Kersley: 1939–2000

A Moment in the History of Contactology

by Oliver H. Dabezies, Jr., MD, FACS

On Thursday, February 10, 2000, two days before his 61st birthday, H. Jonathan Kersley departed this world after a long struggle with cancer.

It is said that everyone can best be characterized by one word. In that context, the word for Jonathan would be "service." Service to his friends, service to his patients, and especially service to the organizational aspects of Contactology.

Jonathan was born in Bath, England on 12 February 1939, just seven months before the outbreak of World War II. Jonathan was the second child of Mary Yeomans Kersley, the wife of George Durant Kersley. Jonathan's father was a very distinguished rheumatologist whose life was also dedicated to service in medicine. He was one of the first rheumatologists in England, and is sometimes credited with being the person who established rheumatology as a sub-speciality in Great Britain. Patients came from all over to his office in Bath. He wrote numerous scientific papers and several books concerning rheumatology. One cannot help but wonder if Jonathan's willingness to be of service was an inherited trait.

Jonathan has an older sister, Gillian Kersley, who is married to William Ryan. Gillian ("Gilli") recalls that even as an a child of five or six, Jonathan had a wonderful bedside manner. Their paternal grandmother, an invalid who was bedridden, reminisced about the past for hours on end. Jonathan would patiently sit at her bedside encouraging her anecdotes. Gilli says that she knew at that time that her brother was destined to be a doctor: no one could sit by a bedside so long to listen to such repetitive conversation.

At age seven, as was the custom, Jonathan was sent to a prep boarding school. (Such a preparatory school is the equivalent of a grammar school in the United States). Then at age 11 he

went to Shrewsbury Public School in Shropshire. (The English public school is the equivalent of a private school at the level of a high school in the United States).

Following this, Jonathan went to Gonville and Caius College^a at Cambridge for his premedical instruction for a three year period, i.e., 1958/59 through 1961/62. Then in 1962/63, he entered St. Bartholomew's Medical School in London, finishing in 1965,^b at which time he received a Master of Arts degree from Cambridge and St. Bartholomew's Hospital. (In 1968 he passed the examinations to become a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons [MRCS] and a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians [LRCP]). He then entered his Pre-Registration

year (1965/66) doing general medicine at Southmead Hospital in Bristol and gynecology and obstetrics at St. Bartholomew's.

Jonathan now began his three years of Post-Registration training in ophthalmology (1966/67). He was Senior House Officer in Ophthalmology at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. In 1966 he received a B. Chir. (Bachelor of Chirurgie) from Cambridge and in 1967 a M.B. (Bachelor of Medicine) from Cambridge.^c

Then in 1967/68 he was Senior House Officer in Ophthalmology at the Croydon Eye Unit. Finally, in 1968/70 he was Registrar in Ophthalmology at Westminster Hospital. It was at the Croydon Unit (which is in Surrey, on the outskirts of London) that he was taught by Mr. Dermot Pierse, who became Jonathan's lifetime mentor. In addition to being a MRCS and a LRCP, Jonathan also became a Member of the Royal College of Ophthalmology (MRCOphth) when it was founded in 1988.

Following the completion of his ophthalmological training, Jonathan began the practice of ophthalmology. He worked for the National Health Service at the Croydon Eye Unit and also had a private practice at his office on Harley Street in London.

Jonathan soon developed a great interest in contact lenses. He was one of the first to report on extended wear contact lenses. He became a frequent lecturer at contact lens meetings, which led to his involvement in the administrative aspects of Contactology. His first organizational involvement was with the Medical Contact Lens Association of the United Kingdom, which eventually (1992) became the Medical Contact Lens and Ocular Surface Association (MCLOS).



H. Jonathan Kersley, MD, with ICLSO Award, Geneva, Switzerland, September, 1999

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^aGonville and Caius is one of the colleges of Cambridge University. It was founded about 1200. It is well regarded for its academic excellence in the sciences. Many pre-med students studied there.

^bJonathan's father was a graduate of Gonville and Caius, and later St. Bartholomew's. This probably influenced Jonathan's choice of these schools.

^cIt was the custom at the time for Cambridge University to award degrees three years after an individual completed a course of study.

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Jonathan also became associated with the British Contact Lens Association (BCLA), the the European Contact Lens Association of Ophthalmologists (ECLSO), the Contact Lens Association of Ophthalmologists (CLAO), the International Contact Lens Council of Ophthalmology (ICLCO), and finally the International Contact Lens Society of Ophthalmology (ICLSO). In all these organization he devoted much effort and received many honors, including the presentation of various lectureships. Later he became a recipient. There is now a Kersley Lecturer in the MCLOSA and ICLSO. There is soon to be a Kersley Lecturer in the ECLSO.

Jonathan is especially remembered by CLAO as ECLSO's ambassador for his efforts to mutually exchange scientific knowledge "across the pond" (Jonathan's expression). His first presentation at a CLAO meeting was in 1980; this was titled "Management of Extended Wear." This was the first of many presentations at the CLAO Meetings. At the 1987 CLAO Meeting, Jonathan was the Distinguished Visiting Lecturer. His topic was "The Impact of Soft Contact Lenses and Intraocular Implants on Cataract Surgery." However, Jonathan's greatest contribution was yet to come.

In 1991, Jonathan organized the first ECLSO Symposium at the CLAO Annual Meeting. The topic was "The Complicated World of Rigid and Soft Lenses." From 1991 to the present, these symposia have been conducted annually as a key feature of the CLAO Meeting. For these symposia Jonathan selected the topics, invited the speakers, and arranged the funding by travel grants from manufacturers. At the 2000 CLAO Meeting, the Symposium was dedicated to Jonathan as the "ECLSO-H. Jonathan Kersley Symposium."

In recognition of his "outstanding dedication, service and commitment to the field of contact lenses and the educational mission of CLAO," Jonathan was given the R. Hugh Minor Distinguished Service Award. Unfortunatley Jonathan was unable to attend the 2000 CLAO Meeting, but he did receive the CLAO Honor Award for his instructional contributions at the

CLAO Meeting.

Recently, in September of 1999, at the opening session of the ECLSO Meeting in Geneva, it was my privilege to arrange a presentation honoring Jonathan at the Opening Ceremonies. Just prior to the ECLSO Meeting, the ICLSO Executive Council had created a "Kersley Lectureship." Also I was to have the privilege of presenting Jonathan an award from ICLSO in appreciation for his services during the past four years as its president.

When it was my turn to speak, I went to the podium and asked Jonathan to step forward. As Jonathan approached the podium there was a spontaneous standing ovation that lasted about five minutes. I then gave Jonathan the award from ICLSO. The award was a marble obelisk with a clock at the base. Jonathan blinked his eyes, but could not speak. Truly he was speechless and overcome with emotion. He left the podium and sat in an adjacent chair. After three or four minutes, I then read the inscription:

"ICLSO in Grateful Appreciation to H. Jonathan Kersley, MD for

Guiding ICLSO in its Development as its First President, January 26, 1999."

Then I asked Jonathan if he wished to say a few words. He lowered his head and nodded "no." He simply could not speak. I then said: "Jonathan, on behalf of all of us, well done. You have left your footprints in the sands of time in Contactology."

One of Jonathan's most endearing characteristics was his bravery. Over the last several months, with typical British "stiff upper lip," Jonathan and I discussed various organizational issues which he wished me to "follow through when I am no longer here." His voice never wavered. It was all very "matter of fact."

During the final months, Jonathan and I engaged in correspondence and conversations. In January of 2000, just prior to the CLAO Meeting in Las Vegas, he sent me a letter which he wanted circulated after his demise. He wanted everyone to be aware of how he would have responded in Geneva had he not been so overcome with emotion. The original memo, which is characteristic of how Jonathan never left anything undone, is presented below.

1) The ICLSO Kersley Lecture

2) The wonderful presentation to me of the marble clock from the ICLSO by Oliver Dabezies, shown above, together with presents from friends of the ECLSO left me sufficiently moved that I was unable to put my thanks into words.

My years with the ECLSO have been largely spent developing and nurturing a network of friendships and personal relationships that would lead naturally to Scientific co-operation between the various National Societies. Co-operation and communication can only flourish in such an atmosphere. If I have achieved this to any degree I am happy.

My view of an International Contact Lens Society of Ophthalmologists was similar but painted with a broader brush. There was a need for co-operation between the major international groups as had already been developing between CLAO and the ECLSO. So the development of a federation of contact lens societies seemed natural. Again such a venture could only occur in an atmosphere of friendship and personal contact as so much time would have to be donated by those involved. I have been very proud to have been part of this process.

The co-operation between the ECLSO, CLAO, SOBLEC and later CLAO-I has been a pleasure to watch. Several individuals have been important in this but none more so than Oliver Dabezies who first as Secretary General and now as President has toiled ceaselessly to keep us all up-to-date. I consider myself fortunate to have been able to work with him over many years.

H. Jonathan Kersley (Great Britain) - Past President ICLSO

H. Jonathan Kersley

In memory of H. Jonathan Kersley

On the 10th of February, at 7:10 pm, H. Jonathan Kersley passed away in his home in London. We all lost one of our dearest friends. Courageously he fought to the very end. It is a privilege and a gift knowing somebody so lovable as Jonathan. He was exceptionally gifted in many professional and personal respects. Personally we owe him not only friendship, but also the possibility of being involved in contactology all over the world. H. Jonathan Kersley was the Honorary President of the ECLSO and Past President of the ICLSO. Jonathan held many important offices, among others he was the President of the BCLA (1978-1979), Secretary, Vice-President, and President of The Medical Contact Lens Association, later becoming "MCLOSA" in the UK. He held office in the ECLSO since 1978, spending most of this time, according to Jonathan "developing and nurturing a network of friendships and personal relationships that would lead naturally to scientific cooperation between the various national societies. Cooperation and communication can only flourish in such an atmosphere. If I have achieved this to any degree, I am happy...." Jonathan held office in ICLCO from

1981 to 1994 and founded the International Contact Lens Society of Ophthalmology (ICLSO) in 1995. Jonathan had the same view on ICLSO as the ECLSO, "but painted with a broader brush." Furthermore he added: "There is a need for cooperation between the major international groups....So the development of a federation of contact lens societies seems natural. Such a venture can only occur in an atmosphere of friendship and personal contacts as so much time has to be donated by those involved. I have been very proud to have part of this process."

In all these organizations Jonathan devoted much effort and received many honors. He presented many lectureships and became later the recipient. In CLAO, Jonathan succeeded during 10 years to make an exchange scientifically and socially between CLAO and ECLSO. At the 2000 CLAO meeting it was decided to dedicate the ECLSO Symposium to Jonathan, as the "ECLSO-H. Jonathan Kersley Symposium." Jonathan was on the editorial board of several contact lens journals. He received many awards in recognition of his outstanding accomplishments in the field of contact lenses. An H. Jonathan Kersley lectureship will

be founded in Europe and in the United States and a memorial fund has been launched to finance an ECLSO Kersley lectureship run by our treasurer, E. Dreisler.

Being the President of the ECLSO and having been a personal friend of Jonathan for more than 10 years, I have to continue his great work. The loss of Jonathan is beyond words. He was our best ambassador and adviser. H. Jonathan Kersley was THE ECLSO, ever since he took on the mantle of Secretary General at the Congress in Stresa 1982.

It is hard to stop grieving, but I do intend and wish for all of us to treasure the wonderful memories we have of his life. Jonathan did not want us to be sad. He wanted us to be full of life and cope with all difficulties. So we have to follow his example to honor him. He valued our friendships so much. Jonathan will always be in our hearts and show us the way of doing our very best...every single moment. The ECLSO owes him much. There will be a memorial service during the month of June in London.

Jane Sparholt
President, ECLSO