

Diabetes 'man of vision' dies tragically in fire

Emeritus Professor Sir Don Beaven, DCNZM, CBE, a leading New Zealand authority on diabetes, died tragically following a fire in a three-storey house he and his wife Gillian owned at Little Akaloa, Banks Peninsula, Canterbury, about midday on Wednesday, 4 November.



Co-patron of Diabetes New Zealand Sir Don was foundation professor of the Christchurch School of Medicine. Aged 85 he was ever a tireless champion fighting diabetes, an energetic advocate of healthy living, and a courteous bon vivant promoting the wine and olive industries. Towards the end of August Diabetes NZ Christchurch celebrated his 85th birthday in style.

Born in Christchurch and educated at Christ's College, and the University of Otago, Sir Don was awarded a Fullbright Fellowship to the United States, where his interest in diabetes research was extended. As a diabetologist he held medical posts around the world including: Royal Northern Hospital, London; Harvard University Medical School, Massachusetts; University of Geneva, Switzerland, and the University of Canterbury. He was a foundation member of the New Zealand Society for the Study of Diabetes which provides medical advice to Diabetes New Zealand.

Diabetes New Zealand president Chris Baty described him as one of the most pre-eminent and knowledgeable people on diabetes in the world. "He was the

conscience of the patient and particularly the conscience of the diabetes patient. People will be shocked all over the world."

Former Diabetes New Zealand president Russ Finnerty and a key organiser of the 7th International Diabetes Federation (IDF) Western Pacific Region Congress in Wellington last year, viewed Sir Don as a person of great and varied learning – "a true polymath whose contributions extended far beyond those for which he was commonly known."

Christchurch Diabetes Centre clinical director Dr Peter Moore said Sir Don had been the "founding father" of the specialty of diabetes in New Zealand who generated enthusiasm in subsequent generations of diabetes specialists. "He was a great man and really laid the groundwork for what we have in diabetes research in Christchurch now."

Sir Don was one of more than 70 people holding a Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (DCNZM) and who were knighted in Old St Pauls, Wellington, on Friday 14 August. In mid-March this year a bronze bust of himself was unveiled

outside the Christchurch Arts Centre as one of 12 Christchurch 'local heroes'. He was a former chairman of the Canterbury Area Health Board.

In 1988, the year before he retired as clinician and researcher from the Christchurch Medical School, he saw the launch by a New Zealand Minister of Health of the first diabetes guidelines. He chaired the working group, which resulted, in 2003, of national guidelines for the management of Type 2 diabetes.

He viewed the knighthood as not just reflecting his own lifetime's work combating diabetes, but rather, he reported modestly, as recognition of the 39 voluntary

societies of Diabetes New Zealand fighting New Zealand's single most serious non-communicable disease.

Diabetes New Zealand chief executive Sarah Thomson said the tragic end to a great life should not be in vain. "He is irreplaceable; his contribution was incalculable, such was his knowledge, energy, compassion, and vision. We must honour his life by continuing to work against the scourge of diabetes. He demanded action on the part of all concerned with the fight against diabetes and we must do the same.

"Our condolences go to his wife Gillian, and to his two daughters Lisa and Sarah."