

OBITUARY

Dr Yvonne Stedman

MBBS, FFSRH, Dip GUM

Yvonne Florence Stedman was born in Bulawayo, then Southern Rhodesia, in 1952. Her father was in the Royal Air Force and was regularly posted to distant locations around the world. She was the youngest of three children. The eldest died as a baby and David, her brother, had Down's syndrome.

The family moved to St Athan in South Wales when Yvonne was a toddler and then to Stroud, Gloucestershire. After a posting in Singapore for 3 years the family returned to Gloucestershire in 1963 and Yvonne completed her schooling at Stroud Girls High School. There she was Head Girl even though she was the youngest in her class. She qualified from Newcastle University in 1975 where she did her first house job, moving to Hope Hospital in Salford for her second job and to marry Michael.

Yvonne thought she might want to specialise in psychiatry but after a 6-month job felt general practice was more her line and she entered a training scheme. She was attracted to working in the field of sexual health from the beginning and got her Family Planning Certificate in the 1970s. She continued part time in general practice but also created for herself a job combining contraception, genitourinary medicine (GUM), cytology and colposcopy. She could have become a partner in general practice but after Michael had cardiac surgery in 1988 she moved entirely to sexual health.

In 1994 she was appointed consultant in family planning and reproductive health care in Worcester. Initially the service was only for South Worcestershire but it became Worcestershire-wide and eventually acquired both GUM services as well as health promotion.

Yvonne was one of the pioneers of integrated sexual health, writing a leader in the *British Medical Journal* in 1995, which caused a lot of correspondence and fed into the debate that eventually led to changes at the Department of Health. The image of beautiful shire horses pulling together illustrated her talks very effectively. Like them she just got on with delivering a truly integrated service without any hype or noise.



She was one of the original team that started the first structured specialist training curriculum in sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and chaired the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) group for the new MFSRH, started in 1997. She also chaired the North West Society of Sexual Medicine and Family Planning and the West Midlands Family Planning Group. She was the first secretary for the Society of Consultants and Lead Clinicians in Reproductive Health, which was founded in 1994 when there were only 18 consultants in the specialty.

Yvonne was an excellent listener and always remained calm despite provocations. She asked necessary and pertinent questions in such a way that they had to be answered. She was gentle, caring and kind but had a quiet determination that achieved many results. An English rose with a core of steel.

She was diagnosed with bowel cancer in 2000 and after her first surgery and chemotherapy returned to work but finally retired through ill health after her first recurrence and further treatment. When no longer able to work she did medical assessments for a local foster care service right up to a week before her death. She had numerous recurrences, all of which she was determined to fight, but eventually the illness overwhelmed her and she died peacefully on 2 January 2012.

Always thinking of others, even when unwell herself, Yvonne emphasised how privileged she felt to have had a job she loved so much and how much she enjoyed her relationships with colleagues, many of whom became friends. She wrote a letter to be read out at the celebration of her life and wished part of it to be in her obituary.

"What can I say of my many friends with whom I have shared laughter and tears over the years? I hope to have written to my friends individually but if I am unable to do so for whatever reason I hope you will forgive me and accept the love and gratitude expressed in this letter. The encouragement and support people have shown me through cards, texts, flowers and visits have been tremendous."

"I have felt very humble at people's thoughtfulness. Without the love and care of family and friends I would have curled up in a ball a long time ago. If you do remember me please do so with a smile. I, like most folk, have made friends throughout the different stages of life – school, university, work and parenthood. Friends and family are our most precious possession and I thank you all for being such a constant and important part of my life."

Yvonne always took great care with her appearance. This was not in a vain manner, but simply another facet of her believing that you should make the best of everything and looking neat and beautiful was part and parcel of that. She had the advantage over many of us that she was stunningly good looking from her flawless skin to her lovely hair, elegant figure, enchanting eyes and a smile that lit up her face. However all this was duly magnified over and over because of her inner goodness, humour, kindness and joy of life.

Yvonne is survived by her husband Michael, historian and writer, and her sons Richard, prison governor, and Jonathan, a trainee in interventional radiology. Their love and support throughout the long illness was invaluable to her and kept her fighting to the end.

Submitted by
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