OBITUARY

Elizabeth (Libby) Wilson 1926–2016

Libby Wilson, who died earlier this year at the age of 89 years, was one of the major names in British family planning. She had become a general practitioner (GP) in Sheffield in the early 1950s and worked with the Family Planning Association, but in 1964 the Association voted to restrict its services to women who were either married or about to be married. Unhappy at this decision and spurred on by the success of a clinic for young unmarried women in London, she and a few other female GPs decided to set up a similar clinic in Sheffield. Condemnation by local clergy created what turned out to be very welcome publicity, and clients soon arrived from all over the north of England.

In 1967, Dr Wilson’s husband Graham was appointed to the post of Regius Professor of Medicine at Glasgow University, and although by then she was relishing running Sheffield’s family planning service, she reluctantly agreed to the move. In Glasgow she continued her family planning work in a clinic mostly serving young married women in a prosperous area of the city. However, she knew that the real need was in deprived areas, where the poverty shocked her. “Glasgow was teeming with rat infested tenements and vast acres of rundown housing estates with no amenities or civic pride”, she wrote.1 She knew that this would be the perfect spot to launch a domiciliary family planning service. In her memoir she described administering the injection to a woman in the public laundry who had decided—against her husband’s wishes—that her tenth child was going to be her last. Dr Wilson led one of the first trials of DMPA in the UK, reporting on her case series of 162 women in the BMJ in 1976, just a year after its use had been approved by the International Planned Parenthood Federation.2

On a trip to Hong Kong in the early 1970s she found out about the new contraceptive injection depot medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA; Depo Provera®) and thought this would be perfect for her clients, many of whose husbands would throw their contraceptive pills in the fire or attempt to remove their intrauterine devices. In her memoir she described administering the injection to a woman in the public laundry who had decided—against her husband’s wishes—that her tenth child was going to be her last. Dr Wilson led one of the first trials of DMPA in the UK, reporting on her case series of 162 women in the BMJ in 1976, just a year after its use had been approved by the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

Letters to the Editor
Letters to the Editor are welcome and generally should not exceed 600 words or cite more than five references. For comments on material published in the most recent issue of the Journal, correspondence should be received within 4 weeks of dispatch of that Journal to be in time for inclusion in the next issue. When submitting letters correspondents should include their job title(s) and their work affiliation(s)/contact address(es). A statement on competing interests should also be submitted for all letters. Letters may be submitted to the Journal Editor or to the Journal Editorial Office (details on the Editorial Board page).