

# Obituaries

## Dr Thomas Richard Emerson

Formerly Consultant Psychiatrist,  
Riverside Health Authority, London



Dr Emerson was born in 1930 into a large Catholic family in London, where his father was a dental practitioner. Thomas was schooled by the Jesuits at St. Ignatius College in Stamford Hill, London, from 1942 to 1949. At school he took part in sports, mainly squash, rackets and tennis, as well as swimming, rowing and judo, all of which he preferred to field games such as rugby and soccer. However, what he lacked in the latter two

sports he compensated for in the classroom. He was also a good chess player, and enjoyed reading, studying and listening to music. He was an outstanding scholar: he sailed through his matriculation and higher examinations with credits and distinctions to spare. On leaving school he worked as a technician for the Medical Research Council while he studied at Birkbeck College in the evenings, obtaining a BSc in chemistry in 1957.

His record was so good that virtually all avenues were open to him *vis-à-vis* the next step up the scholastic ladder. In fact, King's College London was the next step up. Here he completed his PhD degree with no difficulty so that he found that jobs in research were easily open to him. For example, between 1963 and 1965 he worked as a research chemist at Oxford, following which he was 'seized' by London University as a lecturer. Then, in 1966, he scaled all the heights of academic chemistry. He decided to perform an academic somersault and began again at the bottom, this time to scale the medical ladder. To this end, he entered St Bartholomew's Medical School as a student, emerging in 1973 with the degrees MB, BS London to hang on his academic belt.

Now a qualified doctor, he completed his house jobs including that of a casualty officer at St Bartholomew's in 1975. It was at this hospital that he formed a taste for psychiatry and ultimately he was appointed a consultant in Riverside Health Authority where he continued his very successful and indeed amazing career in psychiatry. This included work in Hackney, St Mary Abbots and the Gordon Hospitals but mainly in St Bartholomew's where he eventually retired as a consultant psychiatrist in 1995. After retirement, he acted as a volunteer medical advisor to Amnesty International for some years.

He never married and lived for 35 years in a prestigious and expensive flat in the Barbican. After retirement he found himself free to indulge his hobbies, which included a collection of long-case clocks which he presented to the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers; and a valuable porcelain collection presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is important

to mention that in his will he left a substantial sum to the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

He died on 10 October 2011.

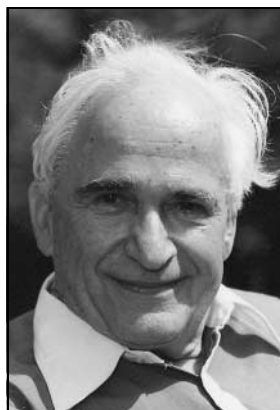
It is a matter of deep regret that I was never given the privilege of meeting Dr Emerson personally. However, I have gleaned a great deal of valuable information for this obituary from his brother. Equally valuable was the curriculum vitae (10 quarto pages) which he enclosed. Paramount for our purposes, and selected at random, is page 8, headed 'Scientific Publications' comprising 12 items, in 6 of which Dr Emerson was the lead writer.

Henry R. Rollin

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## Andrew Charles Skarbek

Formerly Consultant Psychotherapist at Runwell,  
Rochford and Basildon Hospitals, Essex



Andrew Charles Skarbek was inspired to specialise in psychiatry by Donald Winnicott while doing his first house job in paediatrics at the Paddington Green Children's Hospital. Skarbek started training in psychiatry at the Maudsley Hospital. He decided his future lay in psychodynamic psychotherapy and qualified as a psychoanalyst just 5 years after gaining his Diploma in Psychological Medicine. Soon after this he became involved

with the Langham Clinic in London where he was the colleague of Ronald Laing. Skarbek was later appointed clinical director of the clinic when it was renamed the London Clinic of Psychotherapy.

Born in 1925 into a distinguished aristocratic family in Lwów (in what was then Poland), Skarbek's father was the last curator of the family charitable foundation which undertook the care, schooling and professional training of some 500 orphaned children. This way of life, including Andrew's formal schooling, came to an end with the outbreak of war in 1939. He escaped from Poland with his mother and older brother in a tortuous journey through Hungary, Austria and Italy, arriving in England at the end of 1946 to join his father, who had been serving throughout in the Polish Government-in-exile. In 1948 in this new country, faced with having to learn a new language, Andrew, who had already begun his medical studies at the University of Graz, Austria, entered medical school at St Mary's Hospital, and qualified in 1954.

Researching the effects of drugs on speech behaviour at the University College London Psycholinguistics Unit, he gained a PhD in 1967. In 1977, he was appointed consultant

psychotherapist at Runwell, Rochford and Basildon Hospitals, where he developed the psychodynamic psychotherapy services for the local communities. He was also consultant to the Invalid Children's Aid Association School and Manor House School for children with language and communication problems and he was advisor to the National Association for Mental Health on residential establishments. In the early 1980s, he was briefly Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Ottawa and in the early 1990s he led the group therapy programme at the Department of Psychotherapy at University College London Hospital.

He wrote a number of papers on psychopharmacological subjects and more recently a chapter on stresses in psychotherapists in the National Health Service (NHS) in the book *Stress in Psychotherapists* (Varma, 1997). After retiring from the NHS he continued private work.

He was a warm and lively man whose clinical approach to psychoanalytic psychotherapy was open minded. He was influenced by the 'independent' group of psychoanalysts in the British Psychoanalytical Society and was a member of a Freud–Jung study group.

He was married twice, first to Shelagh de Fane Morgan and then to Marjorie Wallace. He is survived by both, as well as by his seven children and Anna Teicher, his partner of the past 20 years. He died in November 2011.

**Peter Shoenberg**

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## Professor Phil Seager

**Formerly Professor of Psychiatry, University of Sheffield and Director of the National Health Service Health Advisory Service**



Phil Seager was an eclectic independent thinker under whose directorship the Health Advisory Service (HAS) brought about nationwide improvements in psychiatric services. His recommendations on behalf of the HAS were not only perceptive and incisive, but sensible and feasible.

He was an inspiring leader, an accomplished academic and a talented clinician. He

published widely on many different subjects including a landmark paper on suicide in Bristol, carried out jointly with Anthony Flood. The article remains a classic of its kind and is still worthy of careful re-reading as a comprehensive clinical and demographic account of suicide in the city. The study was the first to draw attention to the way in which some suicidal individuals alienate themselves from effective help because of their challenging behaviour.

His other research interests included the effectiveness of electroconvulsive therapy, clinical aspects of postpartum mental illness, the menopause and abortion, comparisons of hospital and community treatment, and electrical aversion therapy in compulsive gamblers. He also published papers on

the use of audiovisual aids and telephone conferences and a textbook on psychiatric nursing.

Phil was born in Swansea in 1926. He qualified in medicine in 1949 and completed his pre-registration training in Cardiff. After 2 years of National Service in the RAF based in Singapore and Ceylon, he returned to take up psychiatric training in the United Bristol Hospitals and the Belmont Hospital. During this time he won the Gaskell Gold Medal. He then won a Fulbright Scholarship and spent a year in Iowa, in the USA. Soon after his return to Bristol he gained his MD. After 3 years as consultant psychiatrist at St Mary Abbott's and Banstead Hospitals in London and Surrey he moved to Sheffield to become Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychiatry, where eventually he was appointed to a Personal Chair. During the final 3 years before his retirement he was seconded to the post of Director of the National Health Service (NHS) Health Advisory Service. Throughout the whole of his retirement he continued to offer help at St Luke's Hospice in Sheffield.

He was a prominent figure in the NHS, both in Sheffield and throughout the Trent region. He served on the hospital advisory committee at Rampton Hospital, participated in the work of mental health review tribunals, and was regional advisor for the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He was also President of the South Yorkshire Medico-Legal Society. His enduring interest in both nursing and medical education is revealed by his membership of the General Nursing Council, the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

He took much interest in the production of videotapes as educational aids for medical students and psychiatric trainees, and introduced psychiatric attachments in medical pre-registration posts. For some years, he advised the University of Singapore in its postgraduate training in psychiatry. He was Member of Council of the Association for Medical Education in Europe, and won a scholarship to review the teaching of emotional aspects of medicine in northern Europe. In 1992, he was elected Vice-President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and at various other times he was member of Council, Sub-Dean, member of the Court of Electors and the Examinations Subcommittee, member of the Executive and Finance Committee, Secretary of the Education Committee and Chairman of the Nursing Committee.

Colleagues remember how rewarding it was to meet Phil Seager; his genial manner and broad smile, together with the inevitable colourful bow tie could help ease the most fraught of situations. In no small measure his remarkable effectiveness as a clinician was due to his tolerant and non-judgemental approach, which earned him great respect from colleagues and patients alike. Those close to him also soon realised that his gentle manner belied a fierce determination to stand up for and promote those principles that were dear to him.

His thorough grounding in the realities of face-to-face care of the mentally ill, both in a traditional mental hospital setting and in the general hospital, meant that he was very much aware of the many problems and dilemmas that clinicians face day to day. He was particularly helpful in supporting colleagues whether by listening, advising or even taking over the care of difficult clinical problems. Greatly appreciated too was his work with Alcoholics Anonymous and Gamblers Anonymous.