

Obituary

Dr Malcolm Wright, FRCPsych, BSc, MA
Formerly consultant psychiatrist at Banstead,
Long Grove and Royal Richmond Hospitals



Malcolm was born in 1927 and brought up in Filey, Yorkshire. Educated at Bridlington Grammar School for Boys, he then went up to Leeds University to study medicine, and in 1951 he graduated MBChB as well as obtaining the conjoint qualification MRCS and LRCP. Then, after 2 years as a medical officer in the Royal Air

Force, he chose to train as a psychiatrist, which he did under Sir Martin Roth.

In the late 1960s he was appointed consultant psychiatrist at Banstead Hospital, Epsom, and his out-patient clinic work was done at Richmond Royal Hospital. When Banstead closed, Malcolm transferred to Long Grove Hospital in Epsom, and continued his out-patient clinic and day-hospital work in Richmond. Everywhere he worked he was respected by both his colleagues and his patients (his out-patient clinic often not ending until 20.30). He was involved in Richmond and Barnes 'Mind' until long after his retirement and also continued voluntary work with Shenehom Housing Association in Barnes.

Because of his lifelong interest in archaeology, he took early retirement in 1990 and became a student again, obtaining a BSc in archaeology and later an MA in cognitive evolution. He travelled to the Cradle of Humankind in South Africa and took part in field trips to Turkey, the Massif Central and Tautavel in France, and Boxgrove, just outside Chichester. Retirement also gave him time to travel widely in India, Indonesia, Turkey and Morocco.

For the past 20 years he had spent a lot of time in his house in France with his loving wife Elly. Malcolm became disabled by a rare condition, inclusion body myositis, diagnosed in 2005. This little-known condition gradually weakened him and his mobility was greatly impaired, but he never complained. Academically, he became an even more avid reader. He kept himself up to date with the latest research in evolution-based anthropology, genetics and neuroscience. He also continued to attend the 3-monthly luncheons of the 'Long Grove Veterans' (retired medical colleagues) in pleasant restaurants and pubs in London and Surrey. He last attended in December 2011. He died quietly at the end of January 2012. He was devoted to his wife Elly, his daughter Eve, son David, his granddaughters, and stepson James.

Lewis Clein, with considerable help from Dr Hilary Forsyth (another colleague) and Dr Alan Shamash (a childhood school friend).

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Reviews

**The Optimism Bias:
Why We're Wired to Look on the Bright Side**

Tali Sharot

Constable & Robinson, 2012, £8.99, pb, 272 pp.

ISBN: 9781780332635

After you have finished reading this review, how do you foresee the rest of your day? Why do you expect an untroubled afternoon finishing off a few important tasks in time for catching the early train? Being constantly interrupted followed by an unforeseen near-disaster is just as likely. And why are you going to buy a lottery ticket on the way home, even though the odds of winning are 13 983 815 to 1?

Neuroscientist Tali Sharot thinks she has the answer. Her engaging book, *The Optimism Bias*, is all about how we expect the future to turn out rather better than it usually does. People tend to overestimate the possibility of positive events – for example, having a long-lasting relationship or professional success – and underestimate the likelihood of negative events

such as illness or getting divorced. Sharot studies optimism at a neural level and knows her subject well. The book is written for a general audience and, as is vogueish, mixes hard science with anecdote. So, waiting for a pint of Guinness to pour illustrates the power of anticipation and Sharot's friend Tim's holidays are used to explain how our choices can seem better after we have made them.

Why has optimism evolved? Sharot contends that when our brains predict positive outcomes for us, they are more likely to happen: self-fulfilling prophecies have a survival advantage. Optimism is also crucial for maintaining happiness. Depressed people are much more realistic than average; it seems that when people take off their rose-tinted glasses their equanimity goes too.

It is possible to dispute Sharot's conclusions; this is half the fun. It is a shame that there is little here which engages with *Smile or Die*, social critic Barbara Ehrenreich's recent examination of America's culture of positive thinking. Also, while I found Sharot's central thesis of a widespread human