
EDINBURGH BRANCH PARKINSON'S UK

Ken Bowler – An Appreciation

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Based on a Press Release from Parkinson's UK Scotland, issued 18th October, 2019.



With the death of Professor Ken Bowler on Monday 14th October the Parkinson's community in Scotland and beyond has lost one of its giants. Ken revolutionised the relationship between researchers and people living with Parkinson's. He had not long celebrated his 76th birthday then experienced a short illness.

Originally from Luton, Ken achieved a first class honours degree from Imperial College London where he specialised in Theoretical Physics then received his doctorate in Theoretical and Mathematical Physics from the University of Sussex. He was an eminent particle physicist and retired as Professor of Physics from the University of Edinburgh in 2005. Shortly after, Ken was diagnosed with Parkinson's and became heavily involved in the vibrant Edinburgh Branch of Parkinson's UK. Using his wealth of professional experience he took specific interest in Parkinson's research.

As a volunteer with the charity, Ken brought his enthusiasm for research and his experiences as a person with Parkinson's to the task of assessing applications for research funding. He then played a vital role in establishing the charity's national Research Support Network, which inspires people affected by Parkinson's to get involved in research. The Network is now approaching 6,000 strong and thriving. **Claire Bale, Head of Research at Parkinson's UK,** said: "Ken was a very special person, hugely knowledgeable, generous and kind. He was a collaborator, a listener and do-er, he never wanted to be centre stage. Everyone who worked with Ken – staff, scientists and volunteers – valued him as a colleague and a friend. He has left an incredible legacy to the Parkinson's community that will continue to bring people together in the quest for a cure."

In 2010 Ken and **Patrick Mark, then Edinburgh Branch Hon Chair, met with researcher Dr Tilo Kunath** and discussed the novel idea of creating a world class annual lecture in Edinburgh, and a regular Edinburgh Research Interest Group (ERIG). Ken's remarkable partnership with Dr Kunath, Reader in Regenerative Neurobiology at Edinburgh University, has been the key to the outstanding success of both these initiatives. Combining a wealth of professional experience, quiet determination and considerable ability to persuade others, they have drawn on the prestige of the University's Centre for Regenerative Medicine and the support of the Edinburgh Branch of Parkinson's UK, to give new inspiration to researchers, people with Parkinson's and their families.

Dr Kunath recalls how Ken's persistence, professionalism and leadership ensured ERIG would be, firstly, a success then subsequently a model that could be followed elsewhere: "Ken worked tirelessly, most often behind the scenes, to engage the Parkinson's community with research and researchers. He travelled the country to help other cities set up 'RIGs'. We, the Parkinson's community, have a lot to thank Ken for. He did a tremendous job at erasing the line between scientist and patient, and I am very grateful for that." There are now eight Parkinson's UK Research Interest Groups across the UK based on Ken's Edinburgh model and there are plans for more.

Ken's roles with the Edinburgh Branch of the charity included taking on the Branch website created by Patrick Mark, which Ken went on to develop and maintain. A natural collaborator and organiser, Ken attracted the most pre-eminent scientists from around the world to come to Edinburgh to deliver annual Parkinson's lectures. The eighth lecture took place two weeks before Ken died and it was fitting that his work for the Branch was honoured that evening with the announcement of a new bursary bearing Ken's name and established for young researchers in Edinburgh.

In an open letter from **Edinburgh Branch Hon Chair David Adams**, Ken and the audience were told: "The value of all your activities and skills cannot be overstated. You give a powerful and continuing stimulus to the world-class specialists at work in Edinburgh and further afield, connecting researchers more strongly than ever with the people whose lives they are working to improve. Your passion, conscientiousness and the reach of your unassuming capability, are an inspiration to people with Parkinson's, their carers and health professionals alike. You challenge and extend the horizons of our thinking, our scope for ambition, and our courage for commitment."

Katherine Crawford, Services Director at Parkinson's UK, was the charity's leader in Scotland during the time Ken flourished. She said: "Ken's intelligent approach and broadminded perspective meant that he could always see the bigger picture, and that has really helped the charity develop in all aspects of its work in Scotland. Ken used his skills to best advantage, from delivering meticulously organised events to influencing the charity's work in health and research. Ken's warmth and kindness shone through in all that he did. He always had time to remember people, to share a joke and perhaps an update on the latest rugby scores. We will all miss him very much."

Annie Macleod, Scotland Director of Parkinson's UK concluded: "The Parkinson's community in Scotland was enriched by Ken's presence. Though his place can never be filled we work hard to ensure his legacy thrives. Scotland is at the leading edge of Parkinson's research and when the discovery of a cure comes, and it will come, it will be thanks to the efforts of people like Ken Bowler."

Ken is survived by two daughters. A private funeral will be followed by a celebration of Ken's life to which family, friends and people in Ken's network are invited at Prestonfield House, Priestfield Rd, Edinburgh EH16 5UT on **Monday 28 October at 3:00pm**.

Original Press Release was composed by Graham Kerr, 07827 982626, 07961 460248 (out of hours), gkerr@parkinsons.org.uk.