



# DOMINIC BEER

## 1956-2013, A TRIBUTE

*Dominic Beer, consultant psychiatrist and pioneer in psychiatric intensive care, who served CMF fruitfully for over 20 years, died on 19 April 2013 aged 56.*

### Medicine

Dominic went to Wadham College, Oxford in 1975 to study German and History, but even then was considering medicine. Discovering that having no science A-levels did not necessarily disbar him, he started 1st MB at Guys in 1978, and graduated in 1984. He developed an interest in psychiatry and began a training rotation at Guys, interrupting this with Wellcome Foundation support to gain his MD in the history of psychiatry.

In 1994 he was appointed consultant at Bexley Hospital, Kent, for a locked 15-bedded 'challenging behaviour' ward, and shocked by the lack of purpose and definition, the bad conditions, and the siege mentality, he and colleagues researched psychiatric intensive care units nationally. This led to founding the National Association of Psychiatric Intensive Care and Low Secure Units (NAPICU) and to co-editing the first textbook in the field, *Psychiatric Intensive Care*.

As his career progressed until early retirement on medical grounds in 2011, he held many teaching, lecturing and examining posts within London University; published some 70 research papers; refereed for journals; took on more management and fund-raising responsibilities; and was recognised as a leader who modelled his concern that patients requiring psychiatric intensive care should be treated in 'a decent and concerned way'. That same colleague described his light touch in tricky situations ('extraordinary legerdemain'), his calming presence, and his being always unflappable. They still ask sometimes 'What would Dominic do?'

### Mission

Dominic became a Christian at Oxford, with a conversion somewhat like that of C S Lewis. He was surprised to find people who had a credible intellectual basis for their faith, and with his objections of reason overcome, he discovered that Christians could be reasonable people too.

Dr Douglas Johnson, who founded CMF in 1949, used to say regarding the health of the Fellowship that 'if you take care of the students and of the literature, the rest will take care of itself'. This was certainly true in Dominic's case. Within a few short years he became President of the student Christian Union at Guys, and he served on CMF's Publications and, later, *Triple Helix* committees in the 1990s.

In 1995 IVP and CMF co-published the student-orientated *Christian Choices in Healthcare* he'd edited and which sold over 5,000 copies worldwide, and in 2006 CMF published *Mad, Bad or Sad?* which he had co-edited with Nigel Pocock. This heavyweight academic book became a surprise best-seller with more than 1,200 sales to date. When forced retirement freed up time,

and despite worsening health, Dominic joined the CMF Board.

Dominic sat loosely to churchmanship and secondary issues. Over the years he chaired the PCC at an Anglican church in Bermondsey; was active in the Ichthus fellowship; was part of Churches Together in Lewisham, helping to launch a project with young people excluded from local schools; and at the time of his death he and Naomi were members of Forest Hill Community Church. His emphasis was always on community and love in action.

### Marriage and family

Dominic and Naomi met at Guys in 1981 when he was giving the welcome address at the Freshers' Week lunch and she was the blonde newcomer in the front row smiling Christian encouragement at him. They were later able to dovetail their respective training rotations, and Naomi went on to become a busy GP principal in East London.

Marrying in 1985 they were to be blessed with four children – Charlie (1990), Josh (1992), David (1995) and Esther (1998). Family life was a permanent priority, and Dominic denied some career paths to be there for the children always.

Mycosis fungoides, a cutaneous T-cell lymphoma, was diagnosed in the mid-90s. At first indolent, even then Dominic was anticipating it would shorten his life and was 'processing' a Christian understanding of death and dying. As the disease progressed, his professional activities had to be curtailed, and as it spread systemically in his last months he and the family were upheld by the prayers and support of many.

### The man

From schooldays at Leighton Park, he was an accomplished sportsman, captaining the First XI in each of cricket, hockey and football. Cricket remained a lifelong joy and he skied annually from 1997, yet his personal neuronal wiring never permitted riding, playing the violin, or ceroc dancing! In retirement he took up painting in the style of Kandinsky and Richter, and his online gallery may be seen at [www.dominic.beer.co.uk](http://www.dominic.beer.co.uk) He was humble, self-effacing, a great listener, a thinker rather than a speaker, and always gracious.

How did he fit it all in? Naomi says he was always focused, thinking through in great depth everything he ever did so that nothing happened by default. He made choices and stuck to them, and CMF will always be indebted for his personal 'Christian choices in healthcare'.

*Andrew Fergusson was General Secretary of CMF from 1990-99 and Head of Communications from 2007-11.*

*The 'Dominic Beer Memorial Trust' has been set up to support research or projects to improve the health and wellbeing of sufferers of severe mental illness. Donations to the trust, which may be gift-aided, can be made via the CMF Office.*