

OBITUARY
HARRY LAWRENCE MCINTYRE SMITH
22 MAY 1931 – 24 SEPTEMBER 2022
GENERAL, PAEDIATRIC AND VASCULAR SURGEON

Harry Lawrence McIntyre Smith (known to all as Laurie) was born in Whanganui to Harry Lawrence Smith (a policeman) and Susan McIntyre (Black) Smith. He had an older sister, Ngaire. The family's move to Taumarunui six years later led to a carefree childhood wandering barefoot in the local King Country bush.

When the family moved to Auckland, Laurie first attended Remuera Primary School and subsequently Kings College. A good sportsman, particularly at rugby, he gained a place in the First XV and became Captain of the team. He was also Head Boy and won the Foster Prize for all-round ability. Gaining a scholarship through the Anglican Archbishop, he became a boarder for his final year and qualified for a University Bursary, thus providing much-needed financial assistance.

Laurie completed his medical intermediate at Auckland University and began at Otago Medical School in Dunedin in 1951. There, his rugby career flourished and he represented Otago, South Island and national University teams. After gaining selection for the All Black trials in 1954 for the forthcoming tour of Great Britain he withdrew, believing he couldn't commit to this time away, and he completed his MBChB the following year.

While in Dunedin Laurie pursued his childhood interest in the army, becoming a territorial officer and commencing a long-service commitment, which culminated in his promotion to Lieutenant-Colonel in the Royal New Zealand Armed Medical Corp in 1964 – a position he held until 1976.

In 1956 Laurie returned to Auckland working as a house surgeon. He married Sadie Baird, an Otago physical education graduate, the same year and they subsequently had six children - Sally-Anne, Richard, Nicole, Kristen, James and Julia. Rugby remained a passion for Laurie and he played for Auckland and the Barbarians.

With Sadie he returned to Dunedin in 1958, having obtained a position as a surgical registrar and lecturer at the Medical School. Two years later they travelled to the United Kingdom, Laurie working his passage as ship's doctor. There he completed the surgery course at St Thomas's Hospital and quickly completed his FRCS(Eng). He then secured positions as a Fellow in Professor Charles Illingworth's department at the Glasgow Western Infirmary in 1960 and Registrar at the Chelmsford and Sussex Hospital in 1961.

Accepting a Senior Registrar position at Greenlane Hospital, Auckland, Laurie and family returned to New Zealand in 1962. In that year he gained FRACS in General Surgery. He held a Senior Lecturer position in the Auckland University from 1965 to 1971, progressively restricting his practice to Vascular and Paediatric Surgery. In 1971 he was appointed to a consultant position at Auckland Hospital and at that time commenced some private practice. With others he established renal and liver transplant programmes at Auckland Hospital and progressively specialised in radical head and neck tumour resection and major trauma surgery. A vascular surgeon before it became a separate specialty, at one stage he was on the transplant and paediatric rosters at Auckland and the general and vascular rosters at Middlemore Hospital.

Several colleagues have noted that Laurie was very gifted technically and the most dexterous skilled surgeon with whom they worked. When operating he was never visibly stressed, even amongst ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysms and the worst traumas. The General Surgery team of Laurie Smith and Denys Sumner at Middlemore was regarded by most Trainees as the premier team for a surgical attachment.

Anne Kolbe observed: "Laurie was a fantastic clinical and surgical teacher, very generous in allowing his more senior Registrars full reign in the operating theatre.

She said his catchphrase was: "Just keep me informed".

"Laurie could turn his hand to anything, he was a true General Surgeon," she said.

Laurie served as a RACS examiner in General Surgery.

Paediatric Surgery had been promoted as a separate specialty in Auckland by Selwyn (Sam) Burcher following his appointment in 1951. On his return to Auckland a decade later, Laurie worked alongside Sam and they were joined some 10 years later by Stuart Ferguson.

When Sam died in 1977 after a long illness, Laurie became responsible for holding the Paediatric Surgery service together. Percy Pease joined the service some time later and subsequently Anne Kolbe who, after gaining her FRACS in General Surgery, started her Paediatric Surgical training with Laurie, Stuart and Percy in 1982 and subsequently became a member of the Paediatric Surgery team.

Anne observed that Laurie had superb clinical and technical ability in Paediatric Surgery and taught her much of which she continues to use daily.

"Above all Laurie was warm and kind, always approachable and willing to help, support and advise. He had the most welcoming smile that always put you at ease," she said.

"Without Laurie's leadership and contribution, on the back of Sam Burcher's vision, I think we may never have had the strong Paediatric Surgical service we had at Princess Mary Hospital in the late 1970s/early 1980s.

At that time, all children in Auckland and across the northern half of the North Island had their surgical care provided by paediatric surgeons in specialist Paediatric Surgical wards. It took other parts of New Zealand much longer to establish this practice."

Later in his career, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Laurie faced two major technical challenges - cell phones and laparoscopy. He addressed them both with alacrity. The cell phone gave him clinical freedom to service the multiple rosters and laparoscopy allowed him one more chance to show his surgical skill and adaptability. By 1993 (at the age of 62) he had performed cholecystectomy, bowel surgery, appendicectomy, hernia surgery and fundoplication via the laparoscope.

With his considerable skills, Laurie made significant international contributions to the development of surgery and the provision of surgical services. In 1976 he was an invited Visiting Professor to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Blantyre, Malawi. In 1986 he worked as Locum Surgeon at Khamis Mushat Hospital, Saudi Arabia. In 1996 he was a Visiting Surgeon at Kossamak Hospital, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and the following year he returned to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Malawi, as Associate Professor.

Retiring from his consultant post at the age of 65, Laurie continued locum work in several rural Australian settings and numerous regional hospitals in Aotearoa New Zealand. He finally ceased work when almost 80 years old, but never lost his love of medicine, continuing to receive his surgical journals and attending medical lectures and social events into his 90th year.

Laurie loved all sport, finding it a vital way to relax from the stresses of work. Golf and tennis were his favourites and he was very good at both. He was also a keen skier, and this resulted in many wonderful family ski trips to Mt Ruapehu and Queenstown as well as travel to a variety of destinations overseas. Fishing was another regular pastime, and he would disappear to Taupō whenever the chance arose.

Laurie's long service commitment and contributions to the Aotearoa New Zealand Army were recognised in the award of the Efficiency Decoration (ED) in 1976. He was a very popular and charismatic Army Medical Officer and Surgeon. In 2008 he was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) for services to medicine.

Laurie died peacefully on 24 September 2022, aged 91 years, having played petanque earlier in the day. He was the dearly loved father of his six children and their partners, grandfather of nine and great-grandfather of three.

Anne Kolbe FRACS, Garth Poole FRACS, Chris Holdaway FRACS, Sally Quigley and other members of Laurie's family contributed to the preparation of this obituary.

Dr Allan Panting FRACS