

## OBITUARY

**Dr Stuart Whitaker Brown MNZM**  
**Paediatric Surgeon and Paediatric Urologist**  
**3 OCTOBER 1943 – 24 SEPTEMBER 2022**

Stuart Whitaker Brown was an outstanding clinician, surgeon, colleague, innovator, collaborator, raconteur and all-round good bloke. New Zealand's first formally trained paediatric surgeon, he was strongly influential in setting up and developing a tertiary Paediatric Surgery service at Waikato Hospital. A reader – curious, contrary, skeptical, and insightful - who demanded facts not emotions during many robust debates, Stuart had little time for quackery, believing strongly in science, scientific endeavour and sound scientific process. Nurses used to wind him up, asking whether lavender oil or some variant thereof would be useful for any number of situations. Without fail, he rose to the bait. Medicine was his vocation, occupying a huge chunk of his life. Patients and staff loved him and he leaves an outstanding legacy.

Stuart (Stu) was born in Landour India, to Royston Brown and Annie (nee Reese) who were missionaries in India and later Bangladesh. He had two siblings – an older sister, Olwyn, and a younger brother, Royston. Stu commenced school at the Mt Hermon School in Darjeeling and when the family subsequently returned to Aotearoa New Zealand (AoNZ), attended Campbells Bay School in Auckland. Following the family's move to Wellington he attended secondary school at Wellington Boys College and, approximately one year later following a further family move, commenced at Southland Boys High School, Invercargill. There he was a member of the rugby 1<sup>st</sup> XV, the cricket 1<sup>st</sup> XI and in 1961 was Deputy Head Prefect. He won prizes for public speaking in both his junior and senior year.

On leaving school Stu had hoped to follow a career in physical education but, with his parents advising he first obtain a degree, he studied metallurgy at Otago University, living for two years at Arana Hall. There, at the end of his second year and influenced by others completing their medical intermediate, he applied for and gained entry to Medical School. While at Medical School Stu met Jill Hill, a physiotherapy student, and a close friendship developed. At the end of the fifth year, Stu was the recipient of the ophthalmology prize and it was hoped he might proceed into this specialty.

Stu spent his house surgeon years at Auckland Hospital and obtaining his FRACS. In 1977 Stu and Jill married, subsequently having a family of three boys. Gaining an appointment as a general surgeon, he returned to Waikato Hospital. There, working alongside Graeme Campbell, a general and paediatric surgeon, he developed an interest in Paediatric Surgery and in 1983 obtained a one-year Fellowship at the Melbourne Royal Children's Hospital.

Returning to Waikato Hospital in 1984, Stu joined Graeme Campbell as co-founder of today's regional tertiary paediatric surgical service. He subsequently dedicated the next 32 years of his professional life to the development of the service, retiring in 2015. He was instrumental in developing many aspects of tertiary Paediatric surgery and, significantly, under his purview provided the first Paediatric Surgery outreach service. A 12-year stint of 1-in-2 call, which required continuous call when the other surgeon was on leave, finally ended in 1995 with the appointment of a third Paediatric Surgeon. Stu played a key role in establishing and developing various clinical services including a multi-disciplinary Spina Bifida Clinic, a neonatal surgical service, paediatric endoscopy and bronchoscopy.

Stu was a very able, technically skilled and innovative surgeon and was highly respected by medical, nursing and managerial colleagues. He was thoughtful in his decision-making and an excellent teacher, renowned for some of his pithy words of advice: "You should never give a first opinion if you are afraid of a second opinion" and "Surgery occurs in planes. Dissect in planes. Work from the good to the bad, the known to the unknown."

He was never critical or judgmental, but always supportive and interested. Generous with his time, knowledge, skill and resources, he helped anyone who asked for assistance and the word 'no' didn't seem to exist in his vocabulary. Strongly supportive of younger surgeons in the team in the management

of complex surgical cases, Stu was a key participant in the separation of conjoined twins in 1987 and 2004. A loyal and sociable colleague, he valued the profession and its professional bodies (especially ones that put on a function with beer!). Often arriving late, because of work obligations and looking like he'd been in the garden, Stu was good company.

Stu took on a number of leadership roles. He was a co-founder of the New Zealand Paediatric Surgical Association and held governance roles subsequently. A member of the New Zealand Medical Association he served as chair of the Waikato division. He held governance roles in the Waikato division of the Cancer Society, the Braemar Hospital and the Ministry of Health. In 2017 Stu was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) for services to children's health.

Acquiring land with views and ready access to the sea at Aotea Inlet, Stu built a family bach in the mid-2000s. Separated from Jill he met Trish, a local café owner and a continuing friendship evolved. Stu enjoyed windsurfing and became an avid sailor, participating in numerous off-shore races including the Sydney-Hobart, Auckland-Suva and Round the North Island races. After retiring in 2015, he made his bach at Aotea his permanent base, but enjoyed travelling with trips to India, the Greek islands, South America and Africa. He also honed his fishing skills, focusing on marlin and snapper, as well as flounder in the harbour. Following the purchase of a microbrewery, he began a passion for brewing his own beer, named The Salty Dog.

Stuart Brown died unexpectedly, but peacefully, on 24 September 2022 aged 78 years. The brother of Olwyn and Royston, he was the loving partner of Trisha, proud father of Ben, Sam and Brad, and grandfather of Alby and Arabella.

*Dr Cam Buchanan FANZCA, Udaya Samarakkody FRACS and Brad and Royston Brown contributed to the preparation of this obituary.*

**Dr Allan Panting FRACS**