

# Duncan Forrest

**D**uncan Forrest, who has died aged 81, was an outstanding and innovative paediatric surgeon. In his retirement, he worked on behalf of victims of torture, examining them and writing about human rights.

Early in his career, at St George's Hospital, London, he developed ways of slowing heart rates, enabling paediatric surgeons to perform cardiac surgery. Over the following decade, he was at the forefront of surgical developments in spina bifida and hydrocephalus, working with George Macnab, pioneer in the UK of the American Holter valve, which drained fluid that collected in the heads of children with hydrocephalus. He contributed important refinements in the fitting and maintenance of the valves and shunts that are needed to constantly drain the brains of children with this affliction.

Later, he became a specialist in the surgical repair of cleft lip and palate, and in the 1980s was instrumental in paving the way for the national field trials of folic acid supplements that were proved to prevent many cases of spina bifida.

As a member of the Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus and the British Association for Paediatric Surgeons for many years, he was a fine administrator, lecturer and educator. He served as president of the paediatric section of the Royal Society of

papers on hydrocephalus, spina bifida, a related condition called myelomeningocele, cleft



Forrest ... protected rights

palate, and general paediatric surgery. From 1990 onwards,

Medicine in 1976 and as president of the British Association of Paediatric Surgeons (1985-86).

Forrest was born in New Zealand, the son and grandson of doctors. His

father died when he was six and he was educated at boarding school. He qualified in medicine in Otago in 1947. It was then de rigueur for New Zealand's young hospital specialists to get part of their training in Britain, so he worked his passage to the UK as a ship's doctor.

Forrest started his career in paediatrics at St George's Hospital and, as part of a ground-breaking team, at Great Ormond Street Children's hospital. He gained the fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons, the specialist qualification for surgeons, in 1951. He spent the rest of his surgical career as a consultant at Westminster Children's, Queen Mary's Carshalton and Sydenham Children's hospitals from the early 1960s until his formal retirement, aged 65, in 1987.

He had a passionate interest in human rights and was a long-standing and active member of the medical group of Amnesty International, a network of more than 600 health professionals. When he retired from surgery, he became the medical group's chairman and newsletter editor.

He was also a volunteer clinician for the Medical Foundation for the Care of

he authored numerous articles for learned journals and book chapters in the field of human rights and torture, ranging from Syrian Doctors In Detention (1990), Torture In Egypt (1991), Judicial Punishment In Iraq (1994) and the book Lives Under Threat: A Study Of Sikhs Coming To The UK From The Punjab (Medical Foundation, 1999) to his more recent generic book, Guidelines For The Examination Of Survivors Of Torture, published by the Medical Foundation in a second edition in 2000.

He was the kindest and most generous of men, serious but often, also, very funny. He taught and worked to a high standard of

Victims of Torture. As a senior medical examiner for the foundation, he examined a huge number of people who claimed to be survivors of torture and had a special interest in the particularly brutal treatment meted out to Kurds, and Sikhs from the Punjab. He wrote critically about the ill-treatment and sensory deprivation of prisoners in Guantánamo Bay, the ill-treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan and about the use of shaking, finger-breaking and other techniques in Israeli detention centres.

He taught, trained and encouraged medical colleagues here and abroad to document torture to the standard of evidence required by the courts. He spoke frequently at medical and lay conferences, and to adjudicators in the Immigration Appellate Authority, about medical aspects of torture and the medical-ethical principles that it violated.

He frequently and willingly travelled to immigration detention centres, often at short notice and only hours before a survivor was due to be deported back to the country from whence they came. There he would examine the allegations and document the evidence of torture and thereby help win a detainee's temporary release until their asylum claim could be fully determined, and on better evidence.

Forrest's publications include clinical and research

professionalism. His commitment continued to the end of his life, and he died suddenly.

His wife June, a former actor who became a nurse, died in 2001. He is survived by four children, Alison, Ian, William and Paul.

## Caroline Richmond

*Duncan Mouat Forrest, surgeon and anti-torture campaigner, born December 19 1922; died December 2 2004*