

John Kirker

Born: 1922
President: 1983-1986, 30 Dec 1988 - 1989
Died: 2011

John Kirker was born in Norfolk, England in 1922 into a medical and naval family as both his father and grandfather were surgeons in the Royal Navy. His early education was in military schools. On the death of his mother, when he was 14 years old, John came to live with aunts in Malahide, County Dublin. He subsequently studied medicine at Trinity College Dublin and was then an intern in Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital. Soon after that, in 1948, he was awarded a travelling scholarship to study the emerging science of electroencephalography and the neurological diagnostic tool, the electroencephalogram or EEG. This fellowship allowed him to pursue the specialty at the Boston Children's Hospital and also, for shorter periods, in Chicago and Montreal. In all of these centers he worked with the world leaders in the developing science. The greater part of John's medical career was subsequently dedicated to the exploitation of the techniques learned at this time and which were refined as the specialty matured. Their application was used particularly in the diagnosis and management of epilepsy to the great benefit of patients in Ireland and indeed in Europe.

On his return to Dublin in the early 1950s he was appointed as Consultant Physician at Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital and also to Saint Patrick's Hospital, a psychiatric hospital, both in Dublin. Soon after this he was appointed as Lecturer in Pharmacology at Trinity College Dublin. He was the first to establish an EEG service in Ireland and in 1966 he was a founding member of the Irish Epilepsy Association, which later became known as Brainwave. He served as President of Brainwave from 1982 until his death 30 years later. John Kirker pioneered the development of EEG services throughout Ireland. He was also appointed director of the EEG department of the National Neurosurgery Centre at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin.

Kirker was responsible for establishing in Ireland branches of both the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE) and the International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE). He developed a particular interest in the difficult but important area of driving and epilepsy and was appointed chairman of the IBE's Driving Commission and served from 1989 until 2001. He was the organiser of the IBE Driving and Epilepsy Workshops in Brussels in 1995 and 1996. He was chairman of the



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Scientific Advisory Committee of the outstandingly successful International Epilepsy Congress in Dublin in 1997. A major highlight associated with this was the launch of the ILAE/IBE/WHO Global Campaign against Epilepsy in Geneva and Dublin with the involvement of the Irish President at the time, Mary Robinson. Up to the time of his death John was a member of the 2nd European Working Group on Epilepsy and Driving.

John Kirker's contributions to the improvements in the treatment services for epilepsy was widely recognised. He was appointed Ambassador for Epilepsy by the IBE and the ILAE. These two bodies bestowed on John their much-prized Social Accomplishment Award in Epilepsy in 2007.

Kirker was admitted to the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland in 1956. He served as its first Director of Examinations from 1975 until 1982. In 1981, he was appointed Vice President of the College and between the years 1983 and 1986 he served as President. He returned to the presidency early in 1989 on the death of his successor Ivo Drury (qv). Subsequently he was Chairman of the Medical Education Committee of the Medical Council in Ireland. John was also a member of the Advisory Committee on Medical Training of the European Union.

John was a delightful urbane man known for his courtesy, kindness and unflappability with patients and colleagues alike. John was survived by Elizabeth, his wife of 51 years, and by his son, Stephen, who is a consultant in rehabilitation medicine mainly dealing with patients with multiple sclerosis at Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge. It is noteworthy that he is the third generation of doctors caring for patients with neurological disorders as his grandfather, Jim, on leaving the Royal Navy was appointed to The Royal Hospital for Incurables in Donnybrook, Dublin.

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