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## **Griffith Edwards: An appreciation**

“Medicine is a social science in its very marrow” [1]

Griffith Edwards died on 13 September, 2012 at the age of 83. In a long career as a clinician, scholar, editor, educator and policy adviser, he contributed to knowledge, policy and practice on many fronts. This appreciation deals only with one of those fronts – his contributions as a psychiatric scholar with a deep interest in the social and societal contexts of life.

When I first met Grif in 1970, we were already aware of his pioneering Camberwell study [2,3], then under way. This study’s dual focus on behaviour and problems in the general population and in those being treated or handled by community agencies provided an inspiration for other “community epidemiology” studies of alcohol problems, both in the U.S. [4] and other specific countries and more broadly in the World Health Organization studies of Community Response to Alcohol Problems [5]. The Camberwell study epitomized Grif’s overarching perspective: firmly rooted in clinical experience, but with an insatiably curious eye for what was happening outside the clinic’s door. In the later development of Grif’s work, the inquisitive eye extended beyond Camberwell in the directions both of the historical and the global. His final book review for *Drug and Alcohol Review* [6], published in this issue, shows his strong interest in the historical dimension.

Grif’s perspective was not simply scholarly – he also had a commitment to doing something about what was happening outside the clinic’s door. Thus he was involved for four decades in working in multiple capacities with the World Health Organization. In a psychiatric frame, his WHO-related work will be remembered for the delineation of the alcohol dependence syndrome [7], which played a key role in the shift to the dependence nomenclature in the International Classification of Diseases [8]. But, more broadly, he was keenly interested in the connection between science and policy across the whole range of alcohol, tobacco and drugs [9,10]. In particular, he was a key player in the revival of public health interest in alcohol policy, both more generally and in WHO [11], which until the 1970s had been, as he put it, “in the doldrums” [12]. This included an

instrumental role in motivating and for a time leading the informal international collaborations which, beginning with the “purple book” of 1975 [13], have produced a series of influential reviews of research evidence relevant to alcohol policy [14, 15].

Before writing this, I read for the first time *Matters of Substance* [16], one of Grif’s books for a popular audience. The book covers the whole range of psychoactive substances, bringing to bear a wide range of historical experience, with examples and accounts that are drawn from across the globe (indeed, there are also summative dialogues with a Martian visitor!). It is written in an easy expository style, with illustrative quotations and anecdotes, and acknowledgement along the way of the arguments on different sides of the policy debates. The biological and clinical sides of the picture are covered. But what is striking about the book is the emphasis on the social and societal embeddedness of substance use – the degree to which the social context influences the patterning and experience of use, as well as the nature and severity of problems arising from use. “Embeddedness is the hell of it”, exclaims a subheading in a chapter on policy. Such a sociological view of the social connectedness of everything often makes for an orientation towards the status quo in policy prescriptions, and this seems to me where the book ends up on drug policies. Thus, pleading against “abrupt” or “swingeing interventions”, Grif argues that “drug control policies have as their target not a mass of mutually isolated individuals, but a dynamic, population-based ecological system” [16, p. xxxiv]. But on alcohol and tobacco there is a clearer commitment to change, and ways forward are clearly suggested.

Grif’s emphasis on the social and societal aspects of substance use and his commitment to scholarship that is socially useful are exemplified by *Matters of Substance*. A further social aspect of Grif’s contribution is his commitment and contributions to the collaborative and collective sides of scholarship. Autonomous international collaborating teams of researchers have been a major feature of our field in the last 40 years, and Grif played a key role in the formation and flourishing of many such teams. In other roles, for instance as longtime editor of *Addiction*, Grif made major contributions to building a sense of commonality and cohesion in our scholarly community. One token of this is his inauguration and patient propulsion of the series of *Addiction* interviews with senior members of the field—by now numbering more than 100, with two series of them collected with commentaries in book form [17, 18]. As Grif himself remarked about the series, it “seems uniquely to provide the live sense of people

who care about our complex field of endeavour” [19]. This labour of love is not only a unique resource for future historians, but also a signal contribution to building the field’s sense of a common identity and shared destiny.

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