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## Obituaries

### Margaret Angus Patterson (née Ingram)

**Former medical missionary who became a pioneer in electromedicine**

Meg Patterson came early to medicine and, in spite of her sex, also to surgery. She qualified at the age of 21 during the second world war, and became FRCS (Edinburgh)—lone woman among the hundred candidates—at 25. She was one of only 20 women who had become fellows, and the only one in general surgery. Her career took her to independence India as a medical missionary, where over the next decade she held a number of surgical and teaching posts. With minimal resources she established and expanded community hospitals and clinics. For these "outstanding medical services" she was awarded the MBE in 1961.

Moving to the Far East, Dr Patterson was appointed surgeon-in-charge of the surgical unit, Tung Wah Hospital, Hong Kong. Here, along with her neurosurgical colleagues, in 1972 she made the serendipitous discovery that changed her life and that of her family: that electro-acupuncture analgesia (as applied for post-surgical pain control) could also significantly ameliorate the symptoms of opiate withdrawal. The next year, aged 50, she returned to Britain to pursue clinical and scientific investigation into the technique, giving up her beloved surgery to do so.

Convinced of the therapeutic significance of the treatment's electrical component, and of its medical and social potential, she developed the treatment that she named neuroelectric therapy (NET), as a non-acupuncture, non-pharmacological intervention for the abstinence treatment of substances of addiction. In doing so, she rapidly became recognised as a pioneer in the field of electromedicine.



She had to battle the hostility and suspicion that previously marked Western attitudes to Eastern and "alternative" medicine. But after two decades of commitment combined with raw Scottish obstinacy, she found herself, once again, with minimal resources, establishing and expanding community-based clinics and programmes, this time in a number of different countries. And despite ongoing controversy over the only partially clarified scientific basis of her electrical technique, her peers in international addiction medicine acknowledged her "significant contribution" to the treatment of addiction.

NET became popular with pop stars such as Eric Clapton, Pete Townsend, Keith Richards, and Boy George. Non-drug users such as Yehudi Menuhin gave financial backing to her London clinic.

Meg Patterson was still treating patients and pursuing research into NET when, aged 77, she had a major stroke, from which she never really recovered. She leaves a husband, George; three children; and five grandchildren.

*Margaret Angus Patterson, née Ingram, specialist in the treatment of addiction (b Aberdeen 1922; q Aberdeen 1944; MBE, FRCS Ed), d 25 July 2002.*

[L Patterson ]

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