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He undertook his undergraduate medical training at Oxford University, and qualified in 1965. In the early 1970s he was Research Fellow in Therapeutics at St Christopher's Hospice, London where he studied the use of diamorphine, morphine and methadone in the management of cancer pain, and for which he was awarded the Oxford University higher degree of Doctor of Medicine.

He returned to Oxford in 1976 as the first Medical Director of Sir Michael Sobell House, Churchill Hospital, a palliative care unit within the National Health Service. In 1988 he was appointed Clinical Reader in Palliative Medicine at Oxford University, a post he held until September 2001. From 1988-2005 he was Head of the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Palliative Care.

He is a founder member of the International Association for the Study of Pain, the Association for Palliative Medicine (UK), the British Lymphology Society, the European Association for Palliative Care, the Indian Association for Palliative Care, and the Palliative Care Research Society (UK).

He has taught in some 50 different countries, and has had particularly close ties with Argentina, India and Poland. He has written over 300 articles, chapters and editorials, and is the author of several highly-acclaimed textbooks, notably *Introducing Palliative Care*, *Symptom Management in Advanced Cancer*, and the *Palliative Care Formulary*.

He was elected an honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Radiologists, London in 1996. He has received numerous professional honours, including Lifetime Achievement Awards.