Cardiology in the Young

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James R. Zuberbuhler, 1929–2019

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Obituary

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On 24 June, we lost one of the unsung heroes of paediatric cardiology. Bob Zuberbuhler, usually known simply as Zube, became Chief of Pediatric Cardiology at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh in 1967. He was born on 7 August, 1929 in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. After taking an undergraduate degree at Allegheny College, and achieving his Doctorate in Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, he trained in Internal Medicine and Cardiology at the Universities of Pennsylvania and Michigan. Although his initial training had been in adult medicine, he soon realised that his future lay in the diagnosis and treatment of congenital heart disease and acquired cardiac diseases of childhood. He joined the staff at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh in 1963, initially working under the guidance of Dick Bauersfield. Having taken over the leadership of the Department in Pittsburgh, he trained and mentored an entire generation of cardiology fellows, as well as medical students, paediatricians, and paediatric residents. His skills in auscultation and clinical examination were superb. They were matched by the excellence of his understanding of the various techniques that became established concomitant with the development of the specialty of paediatric cardiology, with he and his team contributing to many of these advances. He was acutely aware of the huge rewards that could accrue from the study of autopsied specimens that revealed all the features of the congenitally malformed heart. In this regard, he was fortunate that Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh housed the archive established and curated initially by Frank Sherman. By the late 1970s, this archive held close to 1800 heart specimens, all retained with appropriate permission for use in research and education. More importantly, the excellent clinical records relating to the patients who had donated the hearts had been carefully collated and stored in volumes held adjacent to the archive itself. It was access to this amazing resource, arranged through the support provided by Zube, that permitted me to hone and expand my own knowledge of the various lesions to be found when the heart is congenitally malformed.



Figure 1. A picture of Zube and his wife with Anton Becker, taken at the time of our initial visit to Pittsburgh.

Anton Becker and I had first met Zube in 1976 (Figure 1), when it proved impossible for us to spend a period at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. Although he had not previously met either of us, his hospitality was overwhelming. For myself, it remained so throughout our long friendship, terminated only by his recent sad passing. More than his hospitality, his guidance and advice were critical in my own development, as they were for the numerous fellows who studied under his guidance, many of whom became and remain my own close friends. During my visits to Pittsburgh, which occurred on an annual basis throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, he spent many hours with me taking superb photographs to illustrate the salient morphological details of the malformed heart. I can attest to the accuracy of the encomium provided for his many friends and colleagues at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh in stating that he was a remarkably effective teacher. As was pointed out, he had established an environment of comradery and team spirit in the Division of Pediatric Cardiology from his earliest days, when there were only a handful of physicians and staff. I can also confirm that this spirit still persists today in the current large and bustling Children's Heart Center. He published extensively. His critical eye was responsible in no small way for the success of many of my own publications. He was fortunate to be supported by his wife, Jan, for more than 60 years (Figure 2).

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Figure 2. A picture of Zube, and his wife Jan, taken subsequent to his retirement.

He brought up a happy family of four children, who have now produced 10 grandchildren, one of whom, Laura West, followed his footsteps into the field of paediatrics at Pittsburgh, albeit now specialising in allergy and immunology rather than cardiology. Zube was rightly proud of Laura's achievements. Over and above his commitment to paediatric cardiology, he had many other interests, not least golf. I spent many happy hours with him and his son-in-law, the father of Laura, on the golf course. Both of us can attest to his skill and competitive spirit. Subsequent to his retirement from paediatric cardiology in 2003, he established an amazing catalogue and website of the wildflowers of Western Pennsylvania. He will be sorely missed not only by myself but also by his family and numerous friends. He was a real gentleman, and an appropriate example for us all.

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