

In Memoriam



**Sir Graham (Mont) C. Liggins, FRS, FRCS, FRCOG,
FRACS (August 24, 2010)**

Sir Graham (Mont) Liggins was born a second twin in rural New Zealand, his forebears having immigrated to the country from England in 1856. Following in his father's footsteps, a General Practitioner and Surgeon, he obtained his medical qualifications from the University of Otago in 1949. Following three years in a busy general practice he elected to pursue training in Obstetrics and Gynecology in the United Kingdom.

Upon his return to New Zealand in 1959, he began work at the National Women's Hospital in the Postgraduate School of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Auckland, where he was to stay throughout his productive academic career. Although initially interested in oral contraception, and assisting with fetal hemolytic disease studies, he soon began his career defining pursuit, namely the etiology of parturition.

He decided to follow a recent hypothesis that the onset of labor was initiated by the fetus, and not the mother as most held, and developed a series of extremely innovative techniques in a chronic sheep model. With these techniques he was able to induce premature delivery by giving ACTH or cortisol to the fetus. He then recognized the importance of the unexpected, namely that the prematurely delivered fetus had partly aerated lungs at a time when they should have been solid.

From the above observations to a rigidly controlled clinical trial he established that the use of antenatal steroid administration to mothers about to deliver prematurely would dramatically lower respiratory distress syndrome and demise in the human neonates. This result has had a major clinical impact throughout the world and was arguably the most important single advance in obstetrical care in the last half century.

He then continued his parturitional studies further elucidating various processes involved, frequently collaborating with the world's leading fetal physiology investigators. He also continued to be involved with studies of fetal lung physiology. Indeed his counsel and wisdom were continually sought after by visiting investigators throughout the years. He always remained interested in helping those interested in a research career and or clinical medicine. He also played a significant role for many years in investigating the diving mechanisms in pregnant Antarctic seals and their fetuses. These studies were very productive and resulted in many novel concepts.

As a result of his numerous contributions he received worldwide recognition, and numerous awards, culminating in his election to the Royal Society in 1980 and his Knighthood. He was an Honorary Fellow of the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Gynecological Society, received the Honorary Doctor of Medicine from the University of Lund, and an Honorary Doctor of Science from Edinburgh University. He also received the Virginia Apgar Award, the Simpson Award from the RCOG amongst others. During his retirement the eponymous Liggins Institute at the University of Auckland was established to further perinatal research.

Although Mont as devoted to his research he always found time for his four children and his devoted wife Celia, who, in her own right, was a gifted and skillful Obstetrician and Gynecologist. In addition, with three close friends he established a 500 acre forest, a definite hands on activity for many years, and, as the forest matured he established a working sawmill. Special leisure time was often spent sailing and enjoying the rewards of fly fishing.

Mont was a special friend and mentor to many, always interested in the totality of life and the pursuit and advancement of knowledge, while also enjoying his free time. He had a positive influence on and enriched the lives of many. As friends and colleagues it was both a privilege and a pleasure to have known and worked with him, as well as enjoying leisure time together.

Submitted Robert K. Creasy, MD