Douglas James Alton, MD (1932–2019)

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Received: 10 December 2019 / Revised: 10 December 2019 / Accepted: 10 January 2020 / Published online: 28 January 2020
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Doug Alton's career as a pediatric radiologist at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto spanned 42 years. He passed away peacefully at home surrounded by family on Feb. 3, 2019, in his 86th year after living with cancer for a year. Doug graduated from the Medical School of the University of Toronto in 1956. He initially enjoyed a successful career as a general practitioner and then changed course

and became a radiologist. Part of his pediatric radiology training included time at Boston Children's Hospital.

International travel was a constant in Doug's life and one of his early contributions to radiology occurred when he took his young family on a 2-year assignment to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where he helped establish the Radiology Department at the University of Malaya. There he also volunteered his medical services in remote regions with aboriginal communities. Many more international adventures followed for Doug and his family, who became true citizens of the world.

In 1968 Doug joined the Department of Radiology at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto as a pediatric radiologist and worked in this position for 42 years before retiring in 2011. At Sick Kids he developed a keen interest in imaging of the genitourinary system in children and made a great impact in the hospital because of his close interactions with clinicians as well as his excellent teaching of hundreds of residents and fellows over the course of his long career.

His international experiences enabled Doug to establish a deep understanding and very close relationship with the trainees at Sick Kids who came from all corners of the world. In the early 1980s one such international trainee was Dr. Lai-Lai Gu, who came from Shanghai to spend 2 years in the Department of Radiology at Sick Kids. Initially Dr. Gu was horrified that we used barium for attempted enema reduction of intussusception because she, like many other radiologists in China, used air as the contrast agent. Doug, like the rest of the radiologists in our department, was at first skeptical about the use of air. He wrestled with this option for several weeks. However, as a true citizen of the world with a keen interest to experience what other cultures were doing, he finally convinced the department that we needed to try this technique that Dr. Gu was suggesting. The rest is history. Presenting the first paper on our experience with the air enema at the first International Pediatric Radiology meeting in Toronto in 1987, Doug received spontaneous applause in the middle of his presentation when he showed a video of a successful intussusception reduction with an air enema. For this

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presentation Doug and Lai-Lai received the Caffey Award from the Society for Pediatric Radiology. Because of his willingness to take on this technique, Doug played an important role in the rapid spread of the use of the air enema to other departments around the world. It was an honor for me to be included by Doug in that project and a real education to be associated with someone who could think so broadly and take on new ideas and concepts. I have kept this learning experience in my mind throughout my career and it has always had positive effects on my clinical practice, teaching and research.

Doug had many other interests — some personal, some global and others local. I have vivid memories of him wandering into my office, hands in pockets and a broad, warm smile on his face. He would proceed to recount his recent weekend or vacation experiences camping, sailing or canoeing with family and friends. At other times he would look more serious and complain about human rights abuses around the world, the proliferation of nuclear arms and environmental issues. He was a peace activist and was committed to the abolition of nuclear weapons. He worked with Physicians for Global Survival and was a member of other disarmament-focused peace organizations. He also worked closely with his wife, Janis, regarding women's rights and freedoms in all parts of the world. He was a humanist and a

compassionate and close friend to many around the world. He also volunteered his time generously in his local community, particularly for the Unitarian Congregation of Mississauga's Refugee Support Committee.

Doug had the unique abilities of combining dedication to professional work with tremendous interests of a global nature that extended well beyond the workplace. As he traveled the world with his family, he developed an extended international family of close friends. Wherever he went, he had a tremendous ability to strike up meaningful conversations with people he had never met.

His family included Janis, his beloved wife of 59 years; his daughter Melanie and her husband, Graham; his son David and his wife, Kathryn; and four grandchildren, Zachary, William, Georgia and Samuel. The sadness of his passing has been felt far around the world by his family, international friends, and those who had the great opportunity to work and train with him in Toronto. Doug was a one-of-a-kind man who is sadly missed.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflicts of interest None