



## Obituary: Leslie Harold Blumgart

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In the year 1981, I secured a place in the General Surgery Residency Program at the prestigious Post Graduate Institute (PGI) in Chandigarh, India. As a young trainee, I was inundated by biliary surgery and my frequent visits to the library and the operation theatre led me to a book called “Clinical Surgery International”. This series of volumes included Biliary Surgery by Leslie Harold Blumgart (volume 5) and the vast numbers of biliary reconstructions soon adopted the Voyles-Blumgart technique of placing the anterior sutures before the posterior sutures (circa 1982), a technique that is still in use today. That was the first time I encountered “Blumgart”, but over the next four decades, I had the privilege of coming into close contact with the man himself.

Over the past 40 years, Professor Leslie (Les) Blumgart has been a colossus that strode the field of HPB surgery. His surgical skill, clarity of thought, and precision of delivery made him a sought-after resource person at any HPB meeting. He enjoyed interacting with faculty and delegates alike.

He began his professional career as a dentist in South Africa, before moving to the UK to study medicine in Sheffield. He went on to do his residency there and then did a surgical fellowship on the management of liver trauma at the University of Nottingham. It was perhaps this experience that caused him to choose a career in HPB Surgery. He worked in Cardiff and Glasgow, and by 1979, he had risen to become Director in the Department of Surgery at the Royal Post Graduate Medical School, London, and a Professor at the Hammersmith Hospital. By the time he moved to Inselspital, Bern 7 years later, he had firmly become established as one of the greats of HPB Surgery. A further 6 years later he was appointed to the Enid A Haupt Chair of HPB Surgery at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York.

During his career, he oversaw and introduced huge changes in the way patients underwent HPB Surgery. A careful assessment of preoperative images (“you can rarely improve the

diagnosis at the operating table” he said), attention to surgical detail, preoperative optimization and postoperative transformed HPB surgery from procedures of great morbidity and mortality to relative safe procedures with good short- and long-term outcomes. He had a vast collection of videos of his brilliant operations and each of these taught us new aspects of HPB Surgery. He was also instrumental in introducing a multidisciplinary approach to HPB disease and in his own words “adding life to years, rather than years to life”, an emphasis on what is now accepted as the most important yardstick of all treatment modalities – quality of life.

Although every HPB Surgeon knows and has read his Textbook on Diseases of the Liver, Biliary tract and Pancreas, and most of us have read his research papers, it was his indefatigable approach to teaching and training that made him a legendary figure in the field. He has lectured to Indian audiences many times, and we were privileged to be present at his Living Legend Lecture at the 8th World Congress in Mumbai, as well as the CME on Liver Surgery at Lakeshore Hospital, Cochin. Surgeons from all over the world have interacted with him and been enlightened by his knowledge and skill. Personally I was privileged to visit him many times in Europe and New York, walk the streets of Heidelberg looking for a cuckoo clock, and enjoying a seafood dinner at the Taj in Cochin. He was an exciting personality with a vast knowledge on a wide range of subjects and he carried his abundant energy to every activity of his, including the hobby of sculpting and painting.

He is survived by his children and grandchildren and his charming wife Sarah, who became my wife Revati’s cherished friend. The field of HPB surgery and the world as a whole will never be the same without this great man.

### Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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