Dr James Ian Summers Robertson, former Honorary Consultant Physician in the Medical Research Council Blood Pressure Unit at the Western Infirmary in Glasgow and Senior Consultant in Cardiovascular Medicine at Janssen Research Foundation in Belgium, died peacefully on Friday 22nd March 2019, aged 91 years.

Born on 5th March 1928 in Welbeck, Nottinghamshire and educated at Queen Elizabeth’s Grammar School in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, and then St Mary’s Hospital Medical School, University of London, Ian graduated Bachelor of Science with 1st Class Honours in Human and Comparative Anatomy in 1949 and Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery with Honours, and Distinctions in Medicine and Pathology, in 1952. At St Mary’s he also found time to be captain of both cricket and soccer. He was admitted as a member of the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1954, and was subsequently elected as a Fellow.

Ian did National Service with the Royal Army Medical Corps from 1954 to 1956, during which time he represented the Army at cricket and rugby union football. He later stated that one of his most demanding military duties was batting at first wicket down against Yorkshire. He also played club cricket for Worksop in the Bassetlaw League in the north of England, and later for West of Scotland in the Western Union.

He then joined St Mary’s Hospital Medical Unit, initially as a Lecturer in Medicine, from 1956 to 1964, and, thereafter, as a Senior Lecturer in Therapeutics and Honorary Consultant Physician, from 1964 to 1967. From 1956, Stanley Peart led St Mary’s Hospital Medical Unit. Peart had purified and sequenced angiotensin II, the product of the action of the renal enzyme renin and the most potent vasopressor agent known at the time. Dr J. Ian S. Robertson, together with Drs Anthony F. Lever and Jehoiada J. Brown, joined the research team as clinician scientists to address the challenge of whether renin and/or angiotensin were the cause of the hypertension caused by renal artery constriction. In 1964, they devised the world’s first reliable and sensitive method for the assay in blood of the enzyme renin, secreted by the kidney.

In 1967, together with Drs Anthony F. Lever, Jehoiada J. Brown and Robert Fraser, Ian moved to the Western Infirmary in Glasgow, where the group set up the Medical Research Council Blood Pressure Unit. Working together, they introduced in Glasgow new ways of pursuing clinical research, with clinicians and scientists working together at the bench and then translating this knowledge to solve complex clinical problems at the bedside. They proceeded to elucidate the role of the renin system in physiology and pathophysiology, especially in the pathogenesis and treatment of high blood pressure and heart failure. Over the years they published extensively on cardiovascular and endocrinological topics, and attracted research fellows from across the UK and overseas, including Australia, New Zealand, the Americas and European countries, many of whom are now leaders of cardiovascular research throughout the world.

In 1993, “The Renin-Angiotensin System” was published, a two-volume book edited by Ian Robertson in collaboration with Dr M. Gary Nicholls, a New Zealand physician who had worked with the Unit, which surveys the Unit’s output over the previous 25 years, together with cognate studies carried out globally.
From 1987 to 1994, Ian was Senior Consultant in Cardiovascular Medicine at Janssen Research Foundation in Beerse, Belgium, concurrently being Visiting Professor of Medicine at Prince of Wales Hospital, Chinese University of Hong Kong. Whilst in Belgium, in collaboration with Drs Herman Van Belle and Paul Janssen, he was involved in the development of nucleoside transport inhibitors as cardio-protective agents. It was, for him, a source of regret that these drugs, despite spectacular experimental success, were not quickly established as human therapeutic agents. He prophesised nevertheless that “their time will come”.

In his later medical career, he was troubled by what he regarded to be excessively euphoric claims of beneficial cardiovascular protection conferred by antihypertensive drugs and dietary salt restriction. Such exaggeration he perceived as inhibiting, rather than encouraging, research in these important fields.

He served as President of the International Society of Hypertension; Chairman of the Scientific Council on Hypertension, International Society and Federation of Cardiology; Foundation President of the British Hypertension Society; Chairman of the Working Group on Hypertension and the Heart, European Society of Cardiology; and as Adviser on Cardiovascular Diseases to the World Health Organization. He also served as a member of the editorial board of numerous journals, including Hypertension and Journal of Hypertension.

Ian was the author/co-author of over 400 published papers on clinical and experimental hypertension; renal, cardiac, endocrine and carcinoid disease; and clinical trials in hypertension and cardiology. His research excellence has been recognised by numerous awards, including both the Robert Tigerstedt Lifetime Achievement Award and the Distinguished Fellow Award of the International Society of Hypertension, as well as prestigious invited lectures, including the Corcoran Lecture of the American Heart Association, the William Harvey Lecture of the European Society of Cardiology, and the Franz Gross Memorial Lecture of the International Society of Hypertension.

Further recognition included the award of MD (Honoris Causa) of the Free University of Brussels, and election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Fellow of the Institute of Biology, Fellow of the American Heart Association, and Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. He was also an Honorary Fellow of the Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand; Portuguese Cardiac Society; Mexican Hypertension Society; Southern African Hypertension Society; Polish Cardiac Society; Venezuelan Society of Pharmacology; Taiwan Society of Internal Medicine; and Chilean Society of Cardiology.

A man of many talents, from 1994, Ian cultivated his interest in music, and graduated Bachelor of Arts with 1st Class Honours in Operatic Musicology from the University of Manchester in 2007. He served as Chairman of Friends of Scottish Opera from 1999 to 2004 and on the Board of Directors of Scottish Opera from 1999 to 2008. He delighted in presenting brief oral vignettes on the work being performed to first night audiences at Scottish Opera.

He developed a particular interest in doctors and in medical matters as portrayed in opera. He lectured extensively on “Doctors in Opera” and proceeded to write a book on this topic. "Doctors in Opera: An Irreverent Look at Operatic Medicine" was published in 2012 and well received, with a second enlarged edition published in 2016. Closely related issues, on which he lectured to the Wagner Society of Scotland and on which he published papers, were the nature and properties of the love potion in “Tristan und Isolde” and the causation of Siegfried’s apparent amnesia in “Götterdämmerung”.

Ian also had a lifelong interest in literature, especially in the use and abuse of the English language, highlighted in an article published in 2004 on literary deterioration in medical writing over the 20th century.

A truly international cardiovascular scientist and opera aficionado, Ian will be sadly missed by the international hypertension community, his friends in the operatic world, and his family.
Ian is survived by his beloved wife, Maureen, children, Fiona, Andrew and Kirsty, and grandchildren, Damian, Nicky, Sydney, Victoria, Max and Fay.

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Professor Robert Fraser PhD DSc FRSE FRSB
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