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In Memoriam

William D. Fraser (1955-2025)

Alexander T. Carswell[1], Allison Chipchase[2], Samir Dervisevic[2], John Dutton[1], Katharine Eastman[1,3], Darrell Green[1,*], Julie P. Greeves[3], Nicole J. Horwood[1], W. Garry John[1], Isabelle Piec[1], Stuart H. Ralston[4,5], Inez Schoenmakers[1], Jonathan C.Y. Tang[1], Jeremy Turner[2], Christopher J. Washbourne[1], Emma A. Webb[2]

[1]Norwich Medical School, University of East Anglia, Norwich Research Park, Norwich, NR4 7UQ, United Kingdom
[2]Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, Norwich Research Park, Norwich, NR4 7UY, United Kingdom
[3]Army Headquarters, Ministry of Defence, Andover, SP11 8HT, United Kingdom
[4]Western General Hospital, Edinburgh, EH4 2XU, United Kingdom
[5]The University of Edinburgh, EH8 9YL, United Kingdom
*Corresponding author: Darrell Green, Norwich Medical School, University of East Anglia, Norwich Research Park, Norwich, United Kingdom (d.green@uea.ac.uk).

Professor William "Bill" Fraser (Figure 1) died following a short battle with cancer on 2 April 2025 in Norwich, United Kingdom. He was 69 years old. His retirement last year meant that the ASBMR community, where he chaired and contributed to numerous panels and debates at the annual meetings, had lost one of its most respected clinician scientists. Bill made major research contributions to our understanding of bone biology, vitamin D, parathyroid hormone (PTH), and calcium metabolism. He conducted ground-breaking clinical trials investigating new therapies for metabolic bone disease, including osteoporosis, Paget's disease of bone, and hypo and hyper parathyroidism. Bill invented several new immunoassays and mass spectrometry techniques. Most significant of all, Bill exemplified how to do it right—how to be an effective and inspiring research leader, doctor and colleague. He had a highly unique brand of incisiveness, a brilliant mind, quick wit, and an endless generosity. This set of qualities represents a very rare legacy.

Figure 1. William D. Fraser, MD (1955-2025).

Bill was born in Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom. He graduated from The University of Glasgow with a BSc (Hons.) in Biochemistry in 1977. He then obtained his medical degree in 1982, winning the Robert Forbes Buchanan McKail Prize in Psychiatry. While at the university, he was awarded a Marcella Doran Scholarship. During his student years, Bill was a keen rugby player, a passion he maintained all his life, especially for the Scottish national team. He also met his wife Aileen while at university.

Bill trained in Glasgow's teaching hospitals, where his original clinical and research interests were in the thyroid. In 1990, Bill obtained a Locum Consultant position, which took him and Aileen to Saskatchewan, Canada. He then returned to the UK and became the Head of the Metabolic Bone Disease Unit at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital and a Senior Lecturer at the University of Liverpool.

Bill remained in Liverpool for 20 years, where he became internationally renowned, becoming Professor in 2001. He acted as a Medical Advisor to the Royal Osteoporosis Society and Parathyroid UK. He served on numerous NHS and regulatory (eg, NEQAS) panels, including as the Director for the analysis and clinical interpretation of bone marker diagnostic tests. He was awarded the ACB Foundation Award in 2006, and he presented the John Ireland Lecture. External inspections on Bill's clinical research services often stated, "one of the best units nationally."

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In 2011, Bill relocated to Norwich Medical School at the University of East Anglia. He became Consultant in Metabolic Medicine at the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital. He was a Senior Examiner for the Royal College of Pathologists. He was a Member of the Endocrinology and Immunoassay Scientific Advisory Group. Under Bill's leadership, Norwich was awarded Paget's Association Centre of Excellence in 2016. Bill became the Dean of Norwich Medical School in 2018, subsequently steering the School through the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024, Bill finally took his retirement, where he planned to "play the golf courses of the world."

Over 42 years, Bill developed new assays for clinical use, developed and refined treatments (eg, bisphosphonates) for metabolic bone disease and expanded basic research into bone and cancer biology. Bill authored more than 650 research papers, four book chapters, and is a named co-inventor of 7 patents. Bill's collaborations with sports scientists have provided critical data on exercise, diet and vitamin D in athletic performance, sport-related bone injuries, and professional sport outcomes.

Bill was a longstanding collaborator to UK Ministry of Defense research projects, investigating musculoskeletal injuries, vitamin D status and health, and most recently sex specific health issues to inform the ministerial Women in Ground Close Combat Review. This research uncovered stress fracture causation and the role of vitamin D, smoking, and the nature of the training program in injury development. His contributions to evidence-based policies for improving the health of military personnel is deemed unprecedented.

Bill demonstrated his accomplished leadership through his strategic and administrative roles. He managed with a principled approach, blending motivation with direction, generosity and always with a superb depth of medical and scientific knowledge. He set others' extremely high standards and expectations and displayed leadership by example. He encouraged and supported developing students, doctors, scientists, and technicians, alike. He was quite simply adored by his patients, who traveled from afar to see him, who he always treated with exceptional warmth, clarity and a well-timed dose of humor; regularly managing challenging patients who had exhausted other treatment options. He found time to support charities, advising the Society for Endocrinology, and he sat on the Board of Trustees for the Paget's Association and Action Arthritis. He cycled from Lands' End to John O'Groats to raise money for the Royal Osteoporosis Society.

For such an industrious clinician scientist, one might think that Bill had little time for anything else. This was very far from the truth! Bill played golf, "squeezed tunes" out of the violin, mandolin, and guitar, and loved to tinker with motor cars and classic motor bikes. He played badminton with his students and completed RideLondon in 2017, getting off his bike to perform CPR on a fellow rider in trouble, before setting off again once an ambulance had arrived!

Talking to Bill was always life-affirming. He was funny, warm, irreverent and full of academic gossip, though on occasion the "I'm not telling you" in his characteristically strong Glaswegian accent was vexing! To have received his mentorship and friendship is a prized and wonderful thing. Our thoughts are with his wife Aileen, their children Helen, Karen, and Brian and grandchildren Isobel, Piper, and Lily.

It's still a huge shock and we are so sorry that his retirement was cut too short—Bill was greatly admired and a really lovely man. We will always have the fondest memories of his compelling storytelling and anecdotes. He was a talented, loyal genius who lived his life to the full, and always with humor, wine and the most rigorous science. It was a rare privilege to have known him and we will miss him forever.

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