



# In Memoriam

## REMEMBERING AAST FOUNDING PRESIDENT

PETER A. MCGREGOR SR., RPSGT  
1928 - 2010



Peter A. McGregor Sr., RPSGT, the founding president of the American Association of Sleep Technologists (AAST), died Jan. 23, 2010, at the age of 81.

McGregor, who was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, Aug. 9, 1928, played an instrumental role in the growth and development of both the AAST and the profession of sleep technology. As a colleague and friend, he was respected and loved by all who knew him.

“As the founding president of the American Association of Sleep Technologists, Peter McGregor was a visionary and an outstanding leader,” said AAST President Cindy Kistner, RPSGT, REEGT. “He will be missed by everyone who had the privilege of knowing him, but his contributions to the development of both the AAST and the profession of sleep technology will continue to have a lasting impact on the sleep field.”

McGregor received a Bachelor of Science degree in Edinburgh and began his career as an electronic technician before coming to the U.S. in 1960. At that time, he took a position as a research assistant at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York.

In 1964 at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, he began his work in sleep research with Dr. Elliott Weitzman. The department moved to Montefiore Medical Center in 1969, with McGregor serving as the chief polysomnographic technologist, conducting both human and animal sleep research. The Sleep-Wake Disorders Center at Montefiore Medical Center became the first sleep disorders center to earn accreditation from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine in 1977.

In 1978 McGregor was the elected chairperson of the founding Steering Committee of the Association of Polysomnographic Technologists (APT), which later became the AAST. In 1979 he was one of seven sleep technologists to take the inaugural certification examination in polysomnographic technology, and he has the distinction of holding the registered polysomnographic technologist (RPSGT) credential #001.

In 1981 McGregor was elected the first president of the AAST.

“First of all let me say that I appreciate your vote of confidence on being elected President of APT,” he wrote in a president’s report to the members. “My first term of office was on an interim basis until this election. I can assure you all that I will do my best

to represent our Society in the best possible way.”

McGregor held the office until 1983, when he was succeeded by Sharon Keenan, PhD, RPSGT, REEGT. He was a lifelong proponent of professional education, training and certification for sleep technologists.

“We must keep our standards high and let’s get our examination curriculum developing at a high level, because there is no room for second best,” he wrote in a past-president’s report in 1983. “Sleep Disorders Centers are now rapidly developing and there will be a need for capable technologists at every level, including supervisors and managers. It is very important to have our members well trained and prepared.”

From 1983 until his retirement in 1993, McGregor was the manager of the Montefiore Sleep-Wake Disorders Center, working alongside Dr. Michael Thorpy, who became the center’s medical director in 1982. During his career, he also worked as an educational consultant and lectured on sleep medicine, instrumentation and sleep stage scoring. He also was a technologist examiner for the Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists (BRPT).

In 1984 McGregor was the recipient of the inaugural Elliot D. Weitzman, MD Service Award, which is presented each year to a member of the AAST in recognition of service and dedication to the advancement of the sleep technology profession. He also received the inaugural German Nino-Murcia, MD Achievement Award in 1997, earning recognition as an AAST member who best exemplifies excellence in the performance of a polysomnogram and in patient care. In 1995 the first annual Peter A. McGregor, RPSGT Service Award was presented to a member of the AAST who has exhibited outstanding service and contribution to the association and organizational development.

In 2008 at the AAST 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reception in Baltimore, Md., both McGregor and Keenan were recognized for the significant contributions they made to the establishment and development of the AAST.

McGregor is survived by his loving wife Barbara (Yatsko) McGregor; his dear children Kenneth Dean Tucker, Barbara Tucker O’Brochta, Thirsa Ann Paray and Peter McGregor, Jr.; and beloved grandchildren Adam Paray and Kimberly Tucker.

## THE FIRST RPSGT

By Mark R. Pressman, PhD

I first met Peter in 1978 at Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx. He taught me most of my basic tech skills including scoring. At the time I was a graduate student in psychology working with Dr. Arthur Spielman. I also worked as a sleep tech on the night shift, three nights per week. Peter was chief cook and bottle washer for the Sleep-Wake Disorders Center, at the time one of only four sleep centers in the U.S. and the first accredited center anywhere.

The standard equipment of the time was Grass 78D polysomnographs and paper – lots and lots of paper. Oh, and ink – if your fingers weren't stained with black ink each morning you probably slept through your shift. These were formative years with the foundation of new professions and new societies. Peter was of the opinion that sleep techs needed to have a proper society and certification if they were to be treated by the hospital establishment

as professionals and paid accordingly. From these concerns came the APT (now AAST) and the BRPT. The first exam was held in 1979.

The decision to hold the first RPSGT exam was a major one. The exam had to be designed and written literally from scratch. As opposed to the digital, computer-based exam of today, the major part of the first exam was practical: real set-ups, collodian, paper, ink, recording and scoring. Two groups of examiners were recruited: techs and docs.

After much discussion, Peter decided to be in the first group of examinees, and I became an examiner. This was a major decision. Peter was one of the driving forces in the technology field and was almost always in charge. Now he was an examinee, subject to the whims of examiners and a test that had never been given before.

One part of the exam proved especially tricky. It had been decided that as part of the practical examination, examinees had to demonstrate their knowledge of the recording equipment. We

## THE FIRST PRESIDENT

By Sharon A. Keenan, PhD, RPSGT, REEGT

My first recollection of Peter was as a voice on the phone while I was seated at a Grass Model 8. He was talking me through the interface of the PT5 volumetric pressure transducer to be used with chest bellows to monitor breathing. This was in 1977.

Earlier that year Dr. Calvin Stafford of Crozer-Chester Medical Center and I attended a lecture in Baltimore given by Dr. Elliot Weitzman. Dr. Stafford and I were expanding the services of the EEG lab to include all-night sleep studies, and Peter's assistance was invaluable in the process.

I met him in June 1978 at a meeting of the Association for the Psychophysiological Study of Sleep at Rickey's Hyatt Hotel in Palo Alto, Calif., hosted by Dr. Bill Dement's group at Stanford. Peter was given permission to organize a gathering of individuals who were responsible for collecting data during sleep. Some of us worked in research settings, some in a clinical environment, but all of us knew what it was to watch as someone or something slept. It was wonderful.

Peter had the insight to recognize that we needed an organization to give us a voice. He also encouraged us to establish an examination process to allow for the demonstration of competence in the critical set of skills and knowledge demanded to collect high-quality data. The Association of Polysomnographic Technologists was a strong organization from its inception.

Peter's combined talents in science and technology, coupled with his gregarious and winning nature, were a great force in rallying all of us who shared the burdens and the blessings of working in the sleep lab. Most of us had the experience of being the academic or clinical "stepchild" of some larger entity. Work space and lab space often were carved out of basements or stairwells, and equipment had to be moved to beds that became available to perform the sleep studies.

Peter was also a great teacher. Many will recognize the name of the late Dr. German Nino-Murcia. German's appreciation of

Peter's talents was evidenced by his weekly train trips from Jefferson Hospital in Philadelphia to Montefiore Medical Center in New York. German would carry PSGs by hand (pre-HIPPA days) to review with Peter to learn sleep stage scoring, detection of abnormal events and recognition of artifact. This led to German's ever-present appreciation for the contribution of the technologist to the practice of sleep medicine. And it was our appreciation of this recognition that led to the establishment of the award in his name. It is fitting that Peter was the first recipient of this award.

Peter's leadership of the APT was driven by principles of dedication to the highest quality of work and recognition of the skills necessary to do good work, creating a voice and mechanism for a group of individuals who may have gone unrecognized for a long time. We remain grateful to Peter McGregor, our Number 1, our First President. His impact on polysomnography and sleep medicine has been forever woven into our history.

*Sharon A. Keenan, PhD, RPSGT, REEGT, is the founder and director of The School of Sleep Medicine Inc. in Palo Alto, Calif.*

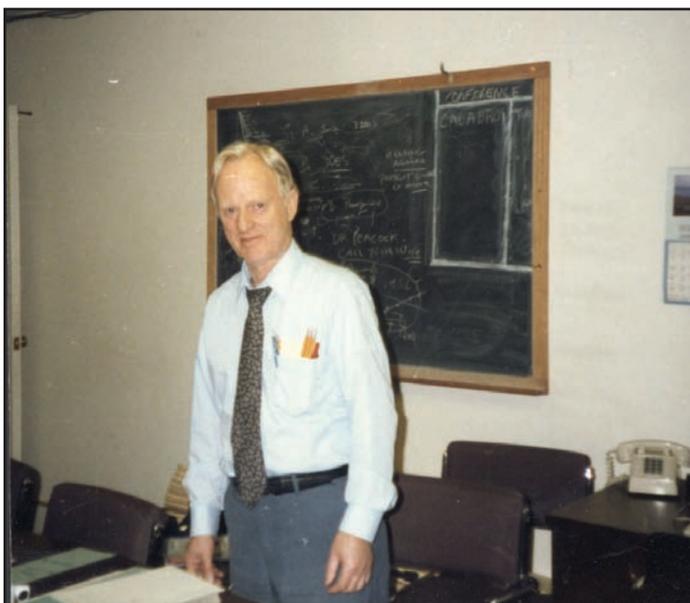


decided to do this by literally sabotaging the 78Ds and having the examinees troubleshoot and correct the problems before proceeding with calibrations and recordings. For those of you who have never seen a Grass 78D, it is as big as a refrigerator with a bank of 12-24 separate amplifiers up the back. Each amplifier was connected by cables to a strip in the back. A large chart drive was in front. Additional cables were connected to galvanometers on which pens were mounted. Well, I guess we were caught up in the excitement of the first examination, realizing that we were actually asked to sabotage Peter McGregor's polysomnograph – with permission! We went overboard and essentially disabled the entire machine. The lights were on, but nothing worked!

Those of you who were lucky enough to know Peter knew that he was basically a gentle soul, and a little Scottish accent might be detectable from time to time. However, if he got excited or angry – a very rare occurrence in my experience – the Scottish accent appeared. I always thought his level of annoyance and anger could be measured by just how strong a Scottish accent was present. Well, the exam began and Peter began to work on his dysfunctional 78D. Ten minutes passed, and a Scottish accent was now detectable. James Bond? Twenty minutes passed, and his Scottish accent now resembled Scottie from Star Trek: “Captain, she’s not gonna’ hold together!”

Thirty minutes later, and everything still was not working. The accent now had a definite resemblance to Scrooge McDuck or maybe Groundskeeper Willie from the Simpsons. What had we done? We – the tech examiners – were getting really apprehensive. What if we had messed up the equipment so badly that the founder of sleep technology actually ran out of time and failed the exam?!! Fortunately, the 78D suddenly hummed back to life just in time, all amps and pens firing. Peter passed with flying colors and a new profession was born. Peter forgave us, but when I would see him at annual meetings, he would often wag his finger at me. I always knew exactly what that meant.

*Mark R. Pressman, PhD, is director of sleep medicine services at Lankenau and Paoli Hospitals, professor at Lankenau Institute for Medical Research and clinical professor of medicine at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, Pa.*



## THE PERFECT ROLE MODEL

By Michael J. Thorpy, MD

I first met Peter in 1980 when I joined Montefiore Medical Center as a fellow. When I first arrived in New York, Peter quickly became a very good friend as well as a helpful and trusted colleague.

In 1982 Dr. Elliot Weitzman, then the director of the Sleep-Wake Disorders Center, left the institution. Peter chose to remain at Montefiore and helped me, as the newly appointed director, continue the clinical and research activities of the facility. Peter's strengths were not just his technical ability, which was clearly superior, but his personality and willingness to help whenever and wherever there was a need. During the early stages of the transition Peter would not only perform overnight sleep studies and MSLTs, and run the sleep lab, but he also helped out with administrative and secretarial duties when the need arose.

He subsequently became the administrator for the Sleep-Wake Disorders Center, a position he held until he retired in 1993. Despite his retirement Peter continued in a part-time capacity and always made himself available to help with sleep studies, teaching or administrative duties. Over the years Peter trained not only many technologists but also many physicians in how to perform and read sleep studies.

I recall one situation when Peter and I were asked to set up a sleep lab on the stage of the Phil Donahue show at the CBS studios in New York City. We sought out the worst sleep apnea patient we could find, someone who was very obese and could not stay awake in any situation. Dr. Bill Dement was there with a narcoleptic poodle that ran around the stage having cataplectic episodes. Peter brought in a Grass model P78 machine and set up the lab in a side room. After connecting the patient and turning down the lights, we waited for the patient to sleep. Peter used his best abilities to get the patient to sleep, but to no avail. It was impossible. Surrounded by cameras and being on the Donahue show was too much for the patient. We ended up getting some drowsy tracings that probably meant as much to the audience as sleep stages, anyway.

Over the years I knew Peter, I counted him as one of my very best friends. Although he will be recognized for his leadership in founding the APT (now AAST) and for being both its first president and the first registered polysomnographic technologist (Reg #001), it is Peter's personality that all of those who knew him will remember most. The APT could not have had a finer first president, not just for his technical ability, but because he led the way in being a role model for how the good technologist should be professionally.

Peter's devotion to quality in technical aspects; an understanding of the history of electrophysiology and the early development of the field of polysomnography; his kind, generous and personable personality; and his willingness to teach others and pass on his knowledge without conditions made Peter stand out as the perfect role model for the future technologist.

*Michael J. Thorpy, MD, is the director of the Sleep-Wake Disorders Center at Montefiore Medical Center and professor of neurology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in Bronx, N.Y. ❖*