



Valentine Moya Macaulay

b:16 September 1955 d:2 July 2024

BSc(Hons) Lond(1976) MB BS (1979) LRCP MRCS(1979) MRCP(UK)(1982) MD(1989) PHD(1995) FRCP(2008)

Valentine Moya Macaulay was emeritus associate professor of medical oncology at the University of Oxford. She had a long and productive research career in cancer biology, and was the first to identify the role of Insulin-like Growth Factors (IGFs) as autocrine growth factors for cancer, opening up new treatment possibilities.

Valentine did all she could to fight against her redundancy notice, and in the end, it turned the very same day she received the histology details about her cancer. She kept working on an emeritus basis and moved her team to a new department where she was very happy. She didn't want to rush around the world ticking off sites from a bucket list; she wanted to continue working on her research on Insulin-like Growth Factors and looking after her students. Not once was there any self-pity of sense of despair.

1955-2024 Vol XII Web

[Browse Indexes](#)

[Return to Results](#)

Her story begins in North London where she was born in 1955 into a medical family – her mother Dr Margaret (Peggy) Kirk (nee Schafran) was an audiological physician, and her father Professor Raymond (Jerry) Kirk was professor of surgery at University College, London and a member of Council of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

In due course she was joined by a brother, Jeremy (a paediatric endocrinologist) and sister Louise (an audiologist) and there was much love and closeness. By the age of four she had already decided to that she wanted to be a doctor. She excelled at South Hampstead Girls School and took up a place at Charing Cross Hospital Medical School in London, gaining a first in BSc Anatomy, and honours in both pathology and applied pharmacology and therapeutics with her MB BS in 1979.

In the same year Valentine married Andrew Macaulay, who became a consultant psychiatrist, and they have three grown up children, Jack, Edward and James. Many friends and colleagues have said that as much as she was passionate about her work, her overriding love was for her family.

House jobs followed at Charing Cross and West Middlesex, and her early experience as an SHO in medical oncology at Charing Cross of seeing young people cured of germ cell tumours confirmed her ambition to train in the speciality. She duly gained a registrar post in medical oncology at the Royal Marsden Hospital from 1983-4 and another at St Georges in infectious diseases in 1984-5, before joining the Institute of Cancer Research as a clinical research fellow from 1985 to 1990. There she was the first to identify IGFs as autocrine growth factors for cancer, as part of her MD in growth regulation in human small cell lung cancer, working with supervisor John Millar. Her MD won the Rogers Prize in 1990 for the best MD thesis submitted between 1989 and 1990.

In 1990 Valentine moved to the Chester Beatty Laboratories as clinical research fellow to undertake a PhD with Alan Ashworth on aromatase and 17 α -hydroxylase-lyase as cancer drug targets, awarded in 1995. Having completed clinical training in medical oncology at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford, she obtained an MRC Clinician Scientist fellowship at the MRC Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine (WIMM) and established a lab group, continuing her work on the role of IGFs in tumour biology with Adrian Harris and Chris Norbury. In 2001 she became a CRUK senior clinical research fellow, university research lecturer and honorary consultant in medical oncology, and from 2007 to 2013 a HEFCE senior clinical lecturer.

In 2021 Valentine was made redundant, but continued as an emeritus associate professor of medical oncology at the University of Oxford, and moved to a new department where she was welcomed with warmth and kindness. In this role she was awarded funding for the WINGMEN trial to find out if an IGF blocker – xentuzumab – given to men with prostate cancer could reduce IGF – and it did, with no severe side effects. The Oxford University department of oncology review of the trial said that it will 'help us understand how we might develop future drugs that target this hormone, including how we can select patients and combine with other cancer treatments.'¹

A warm and heartfelt tribute to Valentine by her friend and colleague Dr Sarah Blagden describes Valentine's indefatigable spirit and determination to carry on working despite her illness:

'Undaunted by her final hospice admission, Val talked excitedly about the results of the WINGMEN study, the clinical trial that was the culmination of many decades of research into insulin-like growth factors (IGFs). Her laptop was beside her hospital bed and she continued her lab meetings and emails, ensuring all loose ends were tied and all salaries for her team were secured. As a testament to her popularity, she had a constant stream of visitors and to each she was as unfailingly kind and supportive as always.'²

She felt that she took too long to develop assertiveness at work but that might be a little unfair. Early in her career she held her own once with a senior colleague who was reduced to calling her 'an argumentative little cow'. She adopted this as a badge of honour and one of her sons had it printed on a T-shirt for her, which became a favourite item to wear to work.

At the symposium in honour of her memory the invitation poster read 'Val exemplified excellence, professionalism, scientific integrity and kindness in her daily work and was the definition of resilience.'³ Following her death Oxford University established the Valentine Macaulay Bursary Fund to honour her commitment to mentoring researchers. The Fund enables underprivileged scientists to attend the IGF and Insulin System in Physiology and Disease Conference.

Valentine was so pleased when her students did well and would always help those who found life hard going. Sometimes in ways they did not even realise. Many would refer to her as 'my UK mum' and kept in touch with her. Unsurprisingly it was standing room only at her memorial service.

Andrew Macaulay

Sources/further reading

¹ Department of Oncology, University of Oxford. Windows trial of Insulin-like Growth factor neutralising antibody Xentuzumab in MEN scheduled for radical prostatectomy. Undated. <https://www.oncology.ox.ac.uk/clinical-trials/oncology-clinical-trials-office-cto/current-trials/wingmen> [Accessed 12 February 2025]

² Blagden S. (2024) Department of Oncology, University of Oxford. Celebrating the life of Professor Valentine (Val) Macaulay. Emeritus Associate Professor of Medical Oncology at the University of Oxford. 4 July. <https://www.oncology.ox.ac.uk/blog/celebrating-the-life-of-professor-valentine-val-macaulay-emeritus-associate-professor>