In memoriam

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Obituary

In memoriam: Professor Stephen J. Morley (1950–2017)

Johan W. Vlaeyen, Francis J. Keefe, Chris J. Main, Christopher Eccleston, Amanda C. de C. Williams

It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Stephen Morley, Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Leeds in the UK, on April 28, 2017. He will be hugely missed in the pain community, as a teacher, researcher, collaborator, and wise and generous commentator on many areas of pain. In honour of this, in 2016 he was awarded honorary membership of the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP); his citation recognized among other qualities his “exceptional dedication to mentoring health professionals in the psychology of pain.” He was very proud to receive this honour, although unable to attend because of his illness. Despite this he continued to be productive until very recently, so that news of his death came as a shock to many.

Stephen fully understood that the history of science conceals a rich but neglected source of knowledge: “If you look for new ideas, read old masters.” In particular, he was inspired by Murray Sidman’s, Tactics of scientific research (1960), which addressed experimental data in terms of their scientific importance, reliability, generality, and replicability; Monte Shapiro, who taught him in the mid-1970s in London, and who recognized the limitations of available nomothetic measures, developing instead sophisticated idiographic measurements. Stephen’s work resonates particularly with these wise foundations, galvanizing them into novel research with remarkable relevance to researchers and clinicians in pain research and management.

As an illustration, Stephen was always fascinated by the individual, and how internal changes such as pain and the external environment (eg, how others respond to pain behavior) shape various individual responses in terms of cognition, behaviour, and the sense of “self.” Stephen was one of the few scholars addressing identity, where pain can infiltrate and affect a person’s sense of self in various ways. He found novel possibilities in investigating the discrepancy between actual and desired/feared states of self, which may elicit negative emotions and serve as a motivational drive to behave in ways intended to reduce that discrepancy. This area of research is still in its infancy, but promises to grow steadily and to become a major topic in years to come.

The marriage of psychological theory and the application of experimental methods to single cases was Stephen’s hallmark. As a scientist-practitioner par excellence, Stephen not only wanted to develop understanding but was equally eager to share his ideas with others, clinicians in particular. He wrote several...
Stephen was also highly valued in the United Kingdom. He qualified as a clinical psychologist in 1975, gained his PhD from the Institute of Psychiatry in London in 1982, and spent most of his career, 32 years, in Leeds, directing the clinical psychology training programme. He was made a Fellow of the British Psychological Society in 1987 and received the 2008 Shapiro Award for eminence in the profession from the Society’s Division of Clinical Psychology. He also received honorary membership of the British Pain Society in 2012. Those of us who worked with him over decades knew him to balance imaginative and wide-ranging understanding of psychology with forensic attention to detail and a deep understanding of statistical methods and products. He contributed very substantially to a systematic review of psychological interventions for pain, and was pleased to see citations of this work exceed the thousand mark.

Stephen was a kind, clever, generous, and warm man whose company and intellectual contributions will be very widely missed. He was deeply contented in his home life, and he leaves his wife of 44 years, Alison, his children, Peter and Clare, his daughter-in-law, Alena, and grandchildren, Gabriel and Polina. His legacy, however, lives on, often unattributed to him, in ideas, research initiatives, understandings and methods, in the professional practice of the huge number of students and colleagues whom he has educated and inspired, and in improvements to the lives of people with chronic pain.

References

