

4 October 2013

John Higginson (1922–2013)

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is deeply saddened by the passing away of Dr John Higginson.



An internationally esteemed researcher, Dr Higginson had a special place at IARC and was highly appreciated. In July 1966, Dr Higginson was appointed the first director and he played a critical role in shaping the then-nascent Agency with his vision for inter-disciplinary research including epidemiology, biostatistics and laboratory sciences. He served as director of IARC until 1981.

Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, on 16 October 1922, Professor Higginson was educated at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution and at Trinity College, Dublin, where he obtained a PhD in biology in 1946 and a doctorate in medicine. From 1947 to 1949, Dr Higginson worked in the Department of Pathology and Bacteriology at the University of Glasgow, and from 1950 to 1958 at the South African Institute for Medical Research, in Johannesburg, where he headed the Geographical Pathology Unit and Cancer Registry.

His studies focused specifically on the role of environmental factors in the development of cancer and cardiovascular disease.

In 1958, Professor Higginson was appointed assistant professor of pathology at the University of Kansas Medical Center, and in 1961 he became a professor of geographical pathology of cancer at the American Cancer Society.

Professor Higginson was a member of the Royal College of Physicians of London, as well as numerous scientific societies, and served on committees of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Institutes of Health in the USA, as well as the Union for International Cancer Control.

He was the author of numerous scientific papers, mostly on the geographical distribution of cancer, including cancer of the liver and gastrointestinal tract.

Dr Higginson passed away on 25 September. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him.