

Esmé Hadfield FRCS (Medicine, 1940)

1921-1992

Esmé Hadfield was a pioneering otolaryngologist, and the first woman to be appointed to the Court of Examiners of the Royal College of Surgeons in England in 1978. She is particularly remembered for her work on adenocarcinoma of the nasal sinuses.

While she was a consultant surgeon to the Ear, Nose and Throat department at Wycombe Hospital, she realised that there was a high incidence of this unusual type of cancer in those exposed to wood dust as a result of their work in the furniture industry in that area. Her important discovery brought her world-wide acclaim, and it was thanks to this discovery that dust extraction methods were greatly improved. Together, she and her co-workers succeeded in having the condition accepted as a notifiable industrial disease. The medical condition became known as Hadfield's disease.

Born in Bristol in 1921, Esmé Hadfield came up to St Hugh's in 1940 to read Medicine. She trained in Otolaryngology principally at the Radcliffe Infirmary, but she also spent time in Canada (as the British Empire Cancer Campaign Exchange Fellow) and Switzerland.

After successive appointments at the Radcliffe, she was appointed consultant surgeon to the ENT department at Wycombe and Amersham Hospitals in 1956. She also held an Associate Surgeon appointment at the Radcliffe Infirmary from 1961.

She received many honours in recognition of her ground-breaking discovery and her many other contributions to Medicine. These included the Hunterian Professorship at the Royal College of Surgeons in England in 1969-70. She went on to become President of the section of laryngology of the Royal Society of Medicine in 1982 and a member of the Court of Examiners for the Royal College of Surgeons of both England and Ireland. She was also a Fellow of the Sloane-Kettering Institute in New York. She retired in 1986.

Esmé Hadfield died in 1992. Her funeral was held at St Hugh's College.

Sources

Soutter, Ann, and Mary Clapinson, eds, *St Hugh's College Register 1886-1959* (Oxford: St Hugh's College, 2011)

Entry for Esmé Hadfield in *Plarr's Lives of the Fellows*, the Royal College of Surgeons of England's collection of biographies of deceased fellows

Obituary for Esmé Hadfield in *St Hugh's Chronicle 1991-1992*, no. 65, pp.90-92

Obituary for Esmé Hadfield in *The Times* 14 April 1992

St Hugh's College Archive – papers relating to Esmé Hadfield