

Alex Gardner Obituary

Professor Alex Gardner died late 2018. Till then he was an Honorary Advisor to the UKPT, and we very much want to remind old-timers, and explain to newcomers, the extent of the debt we all owe him. For those who do not know, Alex was a retired Director of Research for the Health Faculty in the former The Queens College Glasgow, a Chartered Psychologist, and a Registered Psychotherapist. He brought enormous experience, and just as importantly, a larger than life, extravert and friendly approach to our aid. No ivory tower academic was he.

It is sobering to realise that we have to go as far back as September 2001 for the start of his involvement. At that time there was no Association; just a group of men, with a website and a discussion board, wondering what we could do to advertise the condition to the wider world.

Alex and Andrew met while recording a slot for a TV program called "Toilets". Andrew was there as someone with Shy Bladder Syndrome (SBS), Alex as a specialist on fears and phobias. After the shoot, he quizzed Andrew about our set up, and then told Andrew he had decided to make it a personal project to help us. He understood the condition, and was aware how unknown it was – he called it the last secret phobia.

Alex exhorted us to set up a formal organisation, without which nothing could ever be achieved. His backing, and the security provided by his professional standing, enabled us to start doing what was necessary, in spite of our paranoia about being associated with SBS. We started by having a UK support group meeting in Warwick in April 2002 - attended by six guys. In July we held a second meeting in Birmingham, which we used as the opportunity to set up the UK Paruresis Association (UKPA) formally. With Alex's support and professional reference, the UKPA was given charitable status in December 2002.

Following on from that, Alex co-led the first weekend workshop run by the UKPA, in Manchester in March 2003. His humour, larger than life personality, compassion and experience all made a great impression on the participants. Illness prevented him from taking part in workshops thereafter; but the content, based on the International Paruresis Association workshop model and enhanced by Alex, is still what we use today.

In terms of publicity, back in May 2002 Alex obtained a speaker slot at the annual conference of the British Toilet Association; he called his presentation "Who's looking over my shoulder?". This resulted in our getting an article and design guidelines into the journal of the Centre for Accessible Environments, which is read by architects. During the year he got slots on late night phone programs on Radio 5 Live, Birmingham local radio and BBC Radio London. And this was but the start.

He also guested with Andrew and Baz Chalabi on the Richard & Judy show. His professional presence was a godsend. We show that clip on our workshops, so all participants have in a sense met him.

Illness held Alex back the following year, but he decided that the way forward had to be via professional conferences. This culminated in 2005 when he spoke about SBS at an international conference on depression, stress and anxiety, in Budapest; his talk was accepted for inclusion in the proceedings of the conference, giving the subject an international audience. He then secured a stand at the British Psychological Society (BPS) Conference on health psychology in September, and spoke at the Scottish branch of the BPS

conference in November. At this last occasion the subject was picked up by the Press Association, resulting in publicity in several papers. In October and November, he obtained interviews on Radio 2 (The Jeremy Vine show) and Radio 4 (All in the Mind). In 2004 and in 2005, Alex spearheaded our presence at the Anxiety Disorders Conference, which brings international specialists in Anxiety and OCD to a forum that the public can attend.

For over a decade the UKPT has been contacted by solicitors acting on behalf of prisoners charged with refusing to provide a urine sample. Alex has travelled to the relevant prison to assess the prisoner's assertion that he has shy bladder syndrome; where Alex has confirmed this, the case has been dropped, ensuring that the prisoner does not lose privileges or parole.

Compared to where we were in 2001, a group of unhappy men with a condition that no-one knew about, Alex's energy and commitment, as evidenced (only in part) above, has put the condition into the public view, and also into the professional arena.

His sympathetic, energetic and wise support and encouragement have been enjoyed not only by the UKPA/UKPT, but also by many men and women posting on the board, who must have wondered who this "Alex" was who seemed to know what he was talking about, but could not spell!

Now he has left us, having more than achieved what he promised to do; I personally thank him from the depth of my heart for all he has done, for me and for all those who have used the UKPT.

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