

Gregory Monaghan, BScMed(Hon), MBBS(Hon), FRACS Cardiothoracic Surgeon

15 May 1955 — 3 April 1994

One of the new, bright lights of cardiothoracic surgery in Australia was extinguished on Easter Sunday 1994 when Gregory Monaghan died of an overwhelming meningococcal septicaemia.

The eldest of four boys, Greg was educated at St Patrick's College, Strathfield, in Sydney. He excelled in all his subjects and is still remembered by one of his former masters who noted that Greg was well liked and wanted to be a doctor!

Greg studied medicine at the University of New South Wales. He undertook a BSc and graduated with Honours. He continued on his career and, in 1980, graduated with Honours in his MB BS.

During his university days, he commenced his vast collection of friends who were to remain close throughout his life. None closer than Debbie Campbell whom he married and who is the mother of his two children, Christopher and Jennifer.

Greg commenced his medical internship at the St George Hospital in Sydney and remained at that hospital for 5 years, learning the basics of medicine and surgery under the direction of his father, Dr Bill Monaghan, who was then Director of Medical Services at that hospital. In 1985, Greg transferred to the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital where he completed his general surgical training. He continued to excel in each unit in which he worked.

It was during this time that his interest in cardiac surgery was fostered. Towards the end of his general surgical training, he expressed an intense desire to train in cardiothoracic surgery. After completing his general fellowship with ease in 1988, he immediately joined the staff of the cardiothoracic surgical unit in the Page Chest Pavilion. Although junior, his surgical skills, good humour and his ability to remain calm under pressure endeared him to the staff. Long before his training was completed, he was appointed Senior Registrar and took great delight in managing the affairs of his fellow trainees and friends.

Greg took an active interest in all those around him, be they senior colleagues, fellow trainees, nurses, lay staff or patients. He was particularly well liked by his fellow trainees from overseas in whom he took great interest. His natural mimicry, his good humour and his repartee endeared him to all. In May 1990, he passed the final fellowship in Cardiothoracic Surgery for the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. Greg had always wanted to travel, and he applied for, and was given, a year as the British National Heart Foundation Fellow at Southampton in the United Kingdom. He spent a further year as the Senior Registrar in thoracic surgery at the same hospital. Whilst in this post, his professors reported to his Sydney mentors that "we are unable to teach Greg anything. In fact, he spent time teaching us the intricacies of coronary artery surgery".



Greg, however, was to achieve his greatest heights the following year when he was appointed as Chief Resident in Cardiac Surgery and Chief Resident to the transplant team at Stanford University. So great was Greg's contribution to that Unit, that they tried very hard to encourage him to stay as a member of the Faculty.

In fact, Greg spoke little about transplantation. Whilst he enjoyed the challenge of organ transplants, it was the more difficult challenge of thoracic vascular surgery that was to grab his attention. Under the tutelage of Dr Craig Miller, he learnt how to deal with the most difficult thoracic and thoraco-abdominal aneurysms.

On his return to Australia, he set about planning a career path, concentrating on this aspect of cardiovascular surgery. Despite the overtures from Stanford, Greg was a proud Australian. He wished to return home so that his children might be educated close to their grandparents and in the security of Australian society. In 1993, Greg and his family returned to Sydney where he was appointed as Visiting Medical Officer in Cardiothoracic Surgery at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. He also took up a post as a Visiting Medical Officer in Thoracic Surgery at Liverpool District Hospital and was appointed to the staff of Strathfield Private Hospital.

He rapidly established himself as a competent, caring young surgeon with particular skills in the management of thoracic vascular problems. His proudest achievement occurred with one such patient. This patient from interstate had been declared inoperable at a number of vascular institutions throughout the country. The patient took himself to Stanford only to be referred back to Greg Monaghan in Sydney. Significantly, that patient attended the funeral service in St Mary's Cathedral on Friday, 8 April 1994.

Greg's patients adored him, and many became close friends. Greg was known for his calmness under pressure. He always prepared himself for problems and was able to meet any challenge effortlessly and without panic. He was to confront his final short illness in exactly the same way, even advising those around him in his final hours. There was no warning, no precipitating factor or event to predict his demise. In death, as in the whole of his life, Greg simply got on with the job at hand. His colleagues, as well as his family, have been shattered by the suddenness of his demise as much as they were encouraged by the emerging brilliance of his career.

His passing leaves a void that will be difficult to fill.

Greg, you were our shooting star. You rose to heights unknown. You pointed the way to the future. How soon the light was gone. But oh, how long the memory will linger.

Cliff Hughes