

# Robert Malcolm McFarlane

MD, MSc, FRCSC (1927 – 2006), Canada



Bob McFarlane was born in London, Ontario, Canada on May 28, 1927. He graduated in medicine from the University of Western Ontario (UWO) in 1951. He gained certification in general surgery before taking further training in plastic and hand surgery in London and Leeds, England, with Rainsford Mowlem and Mortimer Shaw,

and in Chicago with Sumner L. Koch, Michael L. Mason, John Bell and William Stromberg.

After his return to Canada in 1960, he established a residency program in plastic surgery at UWO and remained Head of the Division of Plastic Surgery until his retirement in 1992, as Emeritus Professor of Surgery. At that time he joined Jim Roth to establish The Hand and Upper Limb Centre at St. Joseph's Health Centre in London.

His early research concerned the delay phenomenon in pedicle skin flaps and other methods of preventing flap necrosis. He developed a flap in the rat that became the standard experimental model in which to study necrosis. Since his residency he has had a consuming interest in Dupuytren's disease. He extended the anatomical studies of previous surgeons such as Kaplan, Gosset, Littler, Stack, and Thomine by identifying the specific fascial structures responsible for joint contracture. Within the Dupuytren's Disease Committee of the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand (IFSSH), he conducted an epidemiological study of surgical patients that began in 1980 and collected data on 11500 patients, provided by 108 surgeons from 12 countries. The

information obtained from that study was too extensive to be published in a journal but was included as a chapter in the book, Dupuytren's Disease by McFarlane, McGrouther, and Flint that was published in 1990.

His other interest included the etiology and treatment of camptodactyly. Prof. McFarlane was the author of 52 scientific papers, 42 book chapters, and two books. He has been an associate editor of the Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Journal, and both of the American and British Journals of Hand Surgery. He is a Past-President of The Canadian Society of Plastic Surgeons and The American Society for Surgery of the Hand, and an honorary member of several National Hand Surgery Societies.

As Delegate, Secretary-General, and President of the IFSSH, he has travelled to many countries as an ambassador of the Federation to encourage the development of hand surgery and hand therapy, as well as the formation of Hand Societies to join the IFSSH.

He married his wife Patricia in 1951 and they had three daughters. During his student years he was regarded as one of the most outstanding athletes in Canada. He was included in the Canadian Olympic team in 1948 (London, UK) and had the honour to be the team flag bearer. He participated in numerous other sport activities throughout his life. His other non-medical interests included breeding of horses, and of course created the inevitable model train setup for his grandchildren.

Bob McFarlane passed away on 27 February 2006. For his immense contribution to Hand Surgery internationally, Robert M McFarlane was honoured "Pioneer of Hand Surgery" in 1998 at the Seventh Congress of the IFSSH in Vancouver, B.C., Canada.