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Death of TB pioneer who saved thousands of lives

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Tributes have been paid following the death of Sir John Crofton, the leading physician whose pioneering treatment of tuberculosis saved thousands of lives worldwide, and who later became an impassioned anti-tobacco campaigner.

Sir John, who lived in Edinburgh, passed away peacefully yesterday aged 97.

Professor Sir Neil Douglas, President of Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, said last night: "The College was greatly saddened by the death of Sir John Crofton. He was one of the pre-eminent physicians of the 20th century.

He was also a leading international figure in tobacco control.

"The work of Sir John and his colleagues has saved many thousands of lives worldwide. Sir John worked tirelessly throughout his life and he was still active until very recently. Our thoughts are with his family and friends at this time and he will be greatly missed."

On return from the battlefield hospitals of World War Two, Sir John was to find himself at the sharp end of Scotland's post-war tuberculosis epidemic when he was put in charge of 400 TB hospital beds in the capital.

It was this work that led him to a series of discoveries about the disease. Crucially, Sir John and his research team made the breakthrough that a combination of three separate antibiotics was required to combat the killer condition.

His admirers have campaigned for greater recognition of Sir John, a former president of the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh, whose work is credited with improving health for millions around the world.

He was professor of respiratory diseases and tuberculosis at the University of Edinburgh for 25 years. He was vice principal between 1969 and 1971 and retired in 1977.

As chair of the Scottish Office health education committee between 1981 and 1986, he produced numerous reports on deprivation, tobacco and alcohol for the NHS and local authorities.

Sir John also spoke of the health impacts of tobacco in the developing world, travelling extensively across Asia.

After co-founding UK Action on Smoking and Health, he became the first chairman of the tobacco and health committee of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease in 1984. Extensive work for the World Health Organisation in Geneva followed.

In 2002, he co-wrote Tobacco: A Global Threat and advised in a civil action in Scotland against a tobacco company the following year.

His work to stem widespread use of tobacco continued well into his latter years, with a ban on cigarette advertising remaining one of his major concerns.

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