

Gerry Bennett

Campaigning geriatrician who exposed abuse of elderly patients



- [*Sheila Hillier and Hilary Scott*](#)
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Professor Gerry Bennett, who has died aged 51 of cancer, devoted his professional life - and much of his personal life - to the care of older people. One of a handful of campaigning geriatricians, he drew attention to the need for high-level specialist care and research in that field. His work on wounds and injuries, together with his careful attention to patient experiences, started to expose the extent of abuse suffered by elderly patients, and, from the mid-1980s, he campaigned and researched to promote greater understanding of its cause and effects.

Born in Twickenham, west London, Gerry was educated at Whitton secondary modern school and Kingston College of Further Education. In 1976, he graduated from the Welsh National School of Medicine (now the University of Wales College of Medicine, Cardiff), and went on to junior doctor posts in Swansea and London. He was appointed as registrar in geriatric medicine at St George's hospital, London, in 1980, working both there and at St James's hospital, Balham.

His earliest research was concerned with clinical standards and delays in treatment. This led him to focus on the care of elderly patients, which, in the 1980s, was still a neglected specialty. He was appointed lecturer at St George's medical school in 1981, adding teaching to his clinical work.

His drive and enthusiasm led to the creation of Ward 14 at St James's; its 17 beds for recovering in-patients, a 10-place day hospital and an attached small occupational and physiotherapy department were featured on BBC television in the early 1980s. In 1984, he became consultant to the London Hospital (now the Royal London Hospital).

Gerry's research on pressure sores led to the establishment of the pioneering East London wound healing unit in 1992. There, his commitment to an interdisciplinary approach and team-work was apparent. The four-bed unit combined the work of clinical nurse specialists, dermatologists, vascular surgeons, chiropodists and social workers.

As a member of the European advisory panel on pressure sores, Gerry was able to influence clinical practice and raise the profile of geriatric medicine outside the UK. He was the founding chairman, and later president, of the charity Action on Elder

Abuse, and co-founder of the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. He was the main researcher for the World Health Organisation-sponsored project on elder abuse in Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Canada, India, Kenya, Lebanon and Sweden which resulted in the report *Missing Voices* (2002). He also contributed to UN investigations into age and gender discrimination and breaches of human rights.

Gerry's vast experience and knowledge were central to his teaching. Always in complete command of his material, he instilled in his students a respect for professional rigour without ever being stuffy. Throughout his career, he wrote and edited and co-authored textbooks, readers and articles about the care of elderly people, elder abuse, Alzheimer's disease and wound care.

In 1995 he became medical director of Tower Hamlets Healthcare NHS Trust. Here, his talents as a teamworker, leader, and, above all, someone who helped others to achieve their potential, were most evident. He also brought innovation and changes, including a clinical audit, a medical education programme and a concern for ethical research and day-to-day practice.

After periods as a visiting professor at Queen's University Belfast (1995) and the Karolinska Institute in Sweden (2001), he became professor of health care of the elderly at the Barts and the London, Queen Mary school of medicine and dentistry.

He leaves his mother Madeleine, his lifelong companion Hywel, and his partner Tom.

• **Gerald Charles Joseph Bennett, geriatrician, born July 28 1951; died April 13 2003**