

John Stephen Doyle

Born: 1929
President: 1991-1994
Died: 2004

John Stephen Doyle, a leading gastroenterologist and pioneer of modern-day endoscopy in Ireland, was President of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland from 1991 to 1994.

He was born in a private nursing home in Upper Baggott Street, Dublin, on 22 December 1929. His family initially resided in Drumcondra but later moved to Ballsbridge, Dublin. He lived there until 1955 when he took up a post as a resident doctor in St Vincent's Hospital.

Doyle's father, Joseph, was Professor of Botany in University College Dublin and his mother Lily, née Leonard, was also a botanist and lecturer in UCD. Stephen was the youngest of four children. His siblings were Joseph, who became a GP in Wicklow; Helen, lecturer in Botany at UCD; and James, an anatomist and orthopaedic surgeon who settled in Canada.

Excelling in his secondary school, Belvedere College, Doyle passed his Irish Leaving Certificate with honours, became Intermediate Schools Chess Champion and was selected for the Senior Cup Team in cricket. After leaving school, he worked for a year as a clerk for the Insurance Corporation of Ireland before going to UCD to study medicine in 1949. Doyle qualified in 1955 with MB, BCh, BAO, having achieved honours in botany, zoology, medicine and surgery. He received a Silver Medal from the Medical Society in 1954 for the Best Student Paper.

After his intern year (1955/56) in St Vincent's Hospital in Dublin, Doyle worked in the Coombe Hospital for three months and then for three months as locum surgical registrar in St Michael's Hospital, Dun Laoghaire. He did six months as a house physician in Cedars, Rochestown Avenue, Dun Laoghaire, working in chest diseases. He then moved to Liverpool where he initially worked in Alder Hey Children's Hospital for a year during which he obtained the Diploma in Child Health. After that, he worked for a year as an SHO in infectious diseases at Fazakerley Hospital in Liverpool, following which he studied for the Diploma in Public Health at Liverpool University. Doyle then worked for five months in general practice in Glasgow. Having decided that general practice was not for him, he considered a career in paediatrics and went back to Alder Hey as a casualty registrar. However, in 1959, he was offered a post as Medical Tutor and Registrar in St Vincent's Hospital and he returned to Dublin.



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In 1961, Doyle was appointed senior medical registrar in St Laurence's Hospital (The Richmond), a post he excelled in especially in the teaching. He obtained his Membership of the College of Physicians and, in 1963, completed his MD. He then went to the US to continue his postgraduate education. He worked in the Lahey Clinic in Boston for one year and then in the Medical College of Virginia as a Research Fellow in Gastroenterology and a junior professor.

Returning to Dublin in April 1965, Doyle worked as a junior physician with a special interest in gastroenterology in St Lawrence's Hospital. That was one of the first two such appointments in gastroenterology in Ireland and he was one of the pioneers of the use of endoscopy for gastrointestinal diagnosis in Ireland. He was elected Fellow of the College of Physicians in 1969.

St Lawrence's Hospital was eventually rebuilt on a different site and reopened as Beaumont Hospital in 1987. Doyle continued working as a senior physician and gastroenterologist in Beaumont Hospital, which was a regional referral centre. The endoscopy suite in Beaumont Hospital was named the Stephen Doyle Endoscopy Unit in his honour. He also practised in the Bon Secours Hospital in Glasnevin. Doyle was an excellent diagnostician and treated his public and private patients with equal respect. His particular area of research interest was oesophageal motility and he produced numerous papers over the years that were published in medical journals in Ireland and the UK.

In the 1980s, he spent a sabbatical as medical director of the Ibn Al Bitar Hospital in Baghdad, Iraq, and was responsible for introducing endoscopy there.

He was appointed Professor of Medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in April 1976 and remained in that full-time position until his early retirement in 1993 due to ill-health. Renowned for his integrity and honesty, Professor Doyle served as President of the College of Physicians from 1991 to 1994 during which time he became a Fellow of all of the Royal Colleges around the world apart from Thailand. Subsequently, he served as President of the Irish Medical Council until 1996 when he was forced to give up the post due to his deteriorating health. Doyle also served on several Boards, including Comhairle na nOspidéal and the Eastern Health Board.

Doyle married Catherine Harrington in 1963. They had three children. After his retirement, they purchased a small farm in Ballyfed, County Wexford. From 1996, they lived there permanently and started breeding hunters. Doyle hunted locally and acted as medical adviser at horse shows in the area. He was a regular at the Dublin Horse Show. He died in 2004 at the age of 74.

A sensitive physician, a natural leader and an excellent organiser, Stephen Doyle was a man who enjoyed life and lived it to the full.

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