

## UNIVERSITY OF LONDON FOUNDATION DAY 2009

Chancellor, in accordance with the Charter, Statutes and Ordinances of the University, I present to you this person on whom we wish you to confer the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Science (Medicine).

### **Professor Sir Graeme Catto**

Sir Graeme is, in his own words, a Scottish physician. He comes from a medical background in Scotland and was raised and schooled in Aberdeen. Indeed, his medical education and training began at the University of Aberdeen. Nevertheless, Sir Graeme discovered an interest in other nationalities and cultures at an early age by winning the New Zealand Government sponsored Otaki Prize at his school to spend a number of months studying in New Zealand. His return to Tilbury (no Scotsman returns to England) may well have strengthened a resolve to study medicine given that 499 passengers on the returning ship were nurses.

As an enterprising medical student, Sir Graeme won many prizes; the most valuable personally was a scholarship to Chicago that enriched his medical experience and provided insight into a different system of health care delivery and funding. His early medical posts after graduating created his life long interest in academic medicine and the desire to combine clinical service with research in nephrology. In 1975, he was awarded a prestigious two year Harkness Fellowship and was appointed as a Fellow in Medicine at Harvard University and Peter Bent Bingham Hospital, Boston USA. Sir Graeme moved his wife and two young children to Boston for the Fellowship and became fully acquainted with academic and clinical practice on the other side of the north Atlantic. Although he may have been tempted to put down roots in the US, Sir Graeme confirmed a preference for his homeland and returned to his work in renal medicine in Aberdeen. His medical career progressed rapidly – Consultant and Senior Lecturer, Reader and then Professor of Medicine and Therapeutics. In 1988, he was appointed Medical Director and then Vice-Chairman of Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust, Dean of the Medical School, Vice-Principal of the University of Aberdeen and, in 1997, Chief Scientist at the Scottish Office's Department of Health.

In parallel with these notable appointments, Sir Graeme began to build a national reputation around professional leadership and governance – someone who not only 'said' but 'did'. He joined the General Medical Council in 1994 and became chair of the GMC Education Committee in 1999. He was an effective chair, overseeing the implementation of '*Tomorrow's Doctors*', the blueprint curriculum for modern medical undergraduate training, and the launch of '*The New Doctor*' that identified the educational needs of a newly qualified doctor. In spite of all of these many commitments, Sir Graeme never lost his interest and passion for the training of young doctors. At the same time as his GMC appointments, Sir Graeme became a member of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.

In 2000, Sir Graeme left Aberdeen to become Dean of King's Medical and Dental School and Vice-Principal, King's College London. Sir Graeme energetically led a restructuring programme within the medical and dental schools following the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise that strengthened the research profile but not to the detriment of teaching and clinical service. Sir Graeme, as the University of London's Pro-Vice Chancellor for Medicine, was a great supporter of medicine and dentistry across the University at a time of considerable change and potential challenge. The continuing strong links across medical schools in London are testament to this.

A new chapter opened in Sir Graeme's life while in London with his appointment as President of the General Medical Council. To many at the time, it could have been seen as a 'poisoned chalice', with considerable public and Governmental scrutiny on the profession's regulator following a series of scandals that culminated in Dame Janet Smith's report on Dr Harold Shipman. Sir Graeme considered strong leadership of the GMC to be of critical importance to the profession, with an urgent need for both the regulator and the profession to put themselves in order. Sir Graeme was to prove, once again, that he does not simply 'speak the talk' but actually 'does the talk'. His period of Presidency, which ended last year, was one of distinction and universal acclaim.

The GMC is a statutory body responsible to Government but independent in its function. Through Sir Graeme's stewardship and expert leadership, the Council not only survived the political challenge of modernisation but emerged as a more unified and reformed organisation that is fit for purpose to govern and direct the medical profession. The reforms of the GMC driven by Sir Graeme include implementation of the revalidation procedures, guidance on end of life care, and the integration of lay members of the public on to its Council. Importantly, the GMC will now be responsible for all aspects of education and training, from entry to medical school until retirement from the profession. Sir Graeme's skilfulness as an ambassador within and on behalf of the medical profession has won wide support from the profession, patients and the public at large, and the belief and conviction that the GMC is the body to uphold the highest standards of excellence in medical education and practice.

Sir Graeme retired from his post at King's in 2005 to return to his former professorial role in medicine in Aberdeen. The word 'retire' is not one that he will recognise – he remains just as active in his current professional and professorial roles, chairing the Scottish Stem Cell Network and the Better Regulation Group at Universities UK and as President of the Association for the Study of Medical Education. A colleague of mine, who lives and works in Edinburgh, used to write regularly to Google-Earth to complain that its map of Scotland was gloomy and indistinct by comparison to that of England. He contacted me recently to say that his plea had been answered and the pixel content of the Scottish map had suddenly been expanded. It was no surprise to me that this additional brightness coincided with Sir Graeme's energetic return to Aberdeen.

Sir Graeme's very significant contribution to medical science, education and research governance has been recognised by a knighthood in 2002 for services to medicine, a Fellowship of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and a number of awards and honorary degrees. It is timely and appropriate that these contributions are now recognised by the University of London. Your Royal Highness and Chancellor, it is with great pleasure that I ask you to confer the honorary degree of Doctor of Science (Medicine) *honoris causa* on Sir Graeme Catto.

**Delivered by Professor Peter Kopelman, Principal, St George's,  
University of London**