

# **30 YEARS AS A PSYCHOLOGIST WORKING ON THE PROBLEM OF ACCIDENTAL AWARENESS DURING GENERAL ANAESTHESIA AND SURGERY: A REFLECTION**

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## **Abstract**

In 1989, having recently arrived in the Department of Psychology, University of Hull, England, I was approached by a local consultant anaesthetist, Dr Ian Russell: he had noticed that his American colleagues were collaborating with psychologists and wondered whether I might be interested. Thus began a thirty-year voyage of adventure and discovery into the nature of consciousness through the lens of general anaesthesia. It turned out that Dr Russell was one of only a handful of anaesthetists in the world conducting research with the Isolated Forearm Technique, which provides a window into consciousness and cognitive function during anaesthesia. I will summarise some of the highlights of the work, whilst also describing my experiences as a psychologist in the operating theatre, culminating in the award of the Humphry Davy Medal by the Royal College of Anaesthetists in 2015.

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## **Biography**

Prof. Michael Wang, BSc(Hons), MSc(Clin.Psy), PhD, C. Psychol., FBPsS, is Emeritus Professor of Clinical Psychology in the Clinical Psychology Unit, Centre for Medicine, University of Leicester, and former Director of the National Health Service-funded Doctoral Postgraduate Clinical Psychology Training Course (2005-2014). He is a former Chair of the Division of Clinical Psychology of the British Psychological Society. Prof. Wang is also a full practitioner member of the BPS Division of Neuropsychology and a member of the BPS Division of Health Psychology. He is Chair of the Association of Clinical Psychologists UK.

He has worked as a clinical psychologist for 40 years. Prior to his appointment in Leicester he was Director of the 6-year, integrated Doctoral Clinical Psychology Training Course at the University of Hull. Throughout his academic career he has maintained an Honorary Consultant role in the NHS, treating patients with anxiety disorders, depression and obsessional compulsive disorder. He has more than 20 years' experience of examining patients with traumatic brain injury for the UK courts.

He obtained his three degrees from the University of Manchester: following graduating with a BSc in Psychology in 1978 he began his professional postgraduate training in Clinical Psychology in the Faculty of Medicine. Subsequently he completed a research PhD in 1990 which investigated learning and memory in alcoholics.

Over recent years Prof Wang has gained an international reputation for his research on cognitive and memory function during general anaesthesia. In 2004 he organized the 6th International Symposium on Memory and Awareness in Anaesthesia and Intensive Care (in Hull) – the foremost international forum for clinical research in this particular field. He has held appointments on a number of prominent committees in the British Psychological Society including the professional accrediting body for clinical psychology training, and a committee that is in the process of determining national standards for competence in the use of neuropsychological tests. He has served as an expert advisor on a NICE (UK) Committee in relation to the monitoring of depth of anaesthesia and also as an expert member of the Royal College of Anaesthesia's National Audit Project 5 (a national audit of anaesthetic awareness reports). In 1999 he was made Fellow of the British Psychological Society and is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine.