Last spring, not long before he died from metastatic prostate cancer, I asked John what he felt were his most important professional achievements. He replied: 'I suppose for me the real highlights of my career have been helping to introduce major cancer surgery in urology to the UK, being at the forefront of subspecialisation in this country, setting up the BAUS Section of Oncology, and finally being elected as Secretary and then President of our specialty association – pity I can’t deliver on that last bit!'

John studied philosophy at university before switching to medicine. He trained at the University of Bristol, qualifying as a doctor in 1979. He gained his Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1983 and subsequently consolidated his surgical experience over the next two years, working as a General Surgical Registrar in the South West Region. In 1985 he returned to a full-time research post in the University Department of Surgery in Bristol where, under the supervision of Professor Robin Williamson, he obtained his Mastership in Surgery.

In 1987, John decided to specialise in urology and moved to Sheffield. While training under Mr John Williams in 1990 he won four major travel scholarships, which enabled him to spend three months in California. Working with the famous Professor Donald Skinner in Los Angeles, he learned the techniques of radical prostatectomy for localised prostate cancer and continent urinary diversion after radical cystectomy for invasive bladder cancer.

In 1991 John was appointed as a Consultant Urological Surgeon with a special interest in oncology, at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield. Here he provided a lead for the unit in developing clinical practice and research in all aspects of kidney, bladder and prostate cancer, and it soon became a regional referral centre for radical prostatectomy.

John was a keen proponent of subspecialisation nationally and in 1997 he helped to set up a national steering group to further this aim. In 1998 he helped to create the British Association of Urological Surgeons (BAUS) Section of Oncology, and he was subsequently elected as its National Secretary and then Chairman.

Having been a member of the national Council of BAUS, John was elected Vice President with a view to taking up the Presidency in 2012, but unfortunately fell ill. He gave a most moving account of his diagnosis at last year’s annual meeting, explaining to the audience why he was unable to take up the Presidency. However, he never complained; typically, he went out and bought a powerful motorcycle to ride around Yorkshire, and spent as much precious time as he could with his family.

With characteristic openness, John was keen for his experience to be made public in the interest of raising awareness of prostate cancer. He appeared in the national press, and just a few weeks ago recorded several films in which he talked lucidly and positively about his own diagnosis.

Another typical quote from John: 'Equally important for me have been the great friends and colleagues I have worked with along the way, the varied places we have gone to over the years and the fantastic fun we have all had in the tremendous specialty of urology – I felt as though I was in a job where you could constantly surf the pleasure wave'.

John was a surgeon’s surgeon and an inspiration to us all. We shall miss him.

Roger Kirby