

# Pask Award

## Dr Chris Monk



Dr Chris Monk has been a popular and respected anaesthetist in Bristol and beyond for over three decades. Born in London, he trained in Manchester, the South West and the USA, before becoming a consultant cardiac anaesthetist at the Bristol Royal Infirmary in 1989. His career encompassed not just clinical medicine but teaching and mentoring, senior management, the establishment of ODP training in Bristol, overseas travel and lecturing, and active involvement in local medical societies.

Few who worked or trained in Bristol have failed to be touched by Chris's sense of humour, wisdom, 'can-do' attitude, enthusiasm for a challenge, and sense of fair play. He epitomises the phrase 'if you want something doing, ask a busy man'. Now semi-retired, he spends his time between the occasional anaesthetic list, cycling and walking, and investing time and energy in his family, including three grandchildren.

It came as no surprise to anyone who knows Chris to hear of the events of Sunday August 20th 2017. Chris and his wife Charlotte were having brunch in a popular cafe overlooking Bristol's harbourside when a gas canister on a nearby pleasure craft exploded, sending a shock wave up to the restaurant and throwing debris into the water.

Chris initially thought the boat was unoccupied but as it began to take in water he saw a woman emerge onto the deck. He ran down the steps to the harbour and, as an eyewitness reports, headed unhesitatingly toward the boat. In retrospect Chris admits that the possibility of a second explosion was somewhere at the back of his mind but that his instinct was simply to run to help.

The lady initially refused to leave the boat as her husband was still on board so Chris jumped onto the deck to retrieve them both, calling to the husband that he needed to leave the (now sinking) craft. The man was very disorientated and bleeding heavily from a head wound and Chris had to descend into the blast-damaged cabin and then lead him out onto the deck, from where he helped the couple to safety. He called to the restaurant to throw down towels and stemmed the man's bleeding, while reassuring and monitoring the couple, until an ambulance arrived.

Typically of Chris, he then returned to the restaurant, asked to borrow a t-shirt to replace his own blood-stained clothes, and finished his meal. Knowing how modest Chris is, the episode would have remained an after-dinner anecdote had the local press not launched a hunt for the 'mystery hero', leading to his identification and recognition in Bristol's 'Gold Star for Courage' awards.

Chris Monk is one of anaesthesia's gentlemen, and although flattered to receive this award plays down his actions, and is already suggesting other anaesthetists who deserve the award in the future. The presence of mind and calmness he showed in this situation reflect his personality and behaviour inside the operating theatre and out, and I am privileged to have been asked to write this citation.

A colleague has pointed out to me that Edgar Pask, the anaesthetist after whom this award is named, spent the Second World War conducting fairly dangerous experiments on the body's response to immersion in water. Aiming to introduce a new lifejacket which would keep the airway above water, Pask allowed himself to be anaesthetised with ether and thrown into a swimming pool while still unconscious to test his designs.

One imagines that he might see the aptness of his eponymous award being presented to an anaesthetist who rescued a couple from a sinking boat. I certainly have no doubt that he would have congratulated Chris Monk on his actions as wholeheartedly as we do.

**Dr Ed Morris**  
Consultant Anaesthetist  
Bristol



**Association  
of Anaesthetists**