The man who launched the UK’s meningitis movement after losing his baby to the disease is “honoured” to receive an honorary degree from the University of Bristol.

Steve Dayman, 66, received the accolade at a ceremony on Monday, July 14, for his relentless, 32-year crusade against the disease that took his 14-month-old Spencer in 1982.

Among his achievements, Steve launched Bristol-based Spencer Dayman Meningitis UK in 1999, to primarily fund a £500,000 state-of-the-art research laboratory at the university.

The Spencer Dayman Meningitis Laboratories officially opened in April 2002 and now house a £2.5 million research investment.

Following Meningitis UK grants, the university has also conducted several pioneering meningitis research projects.

Steve, of Alveston, has raised millions of pounds towards vaccine development, spreads lifesaving awareness and travels across the UK meeting and inspiring affected families.

The degree comes just after the Government agreed to make the UK’s first Meningitis B, the form Spencer had, vaccine free on the NHS, subject to price negotiations with its manufacturer.

His latest mission was co-launching Meningitis Now, a merger of Meningitis UK and Stroud-based Meningitis Trust, in 2013.

Steve, who also received the MBE in 2010 for his work, said: “It’s an absolute honour to be recognised by the university, which houses the labs.

“The labs have made a significant difference towards a better understanding of the disease.

“I’m humbled, but the fight is bigger than one man.

“The honour is tribute to Spencer and the thousands of families touched by the trauma meningitis causes.

“Without my family and friends, it wouldn’t have been possible for me to make the contribution I have.”

Annually, the university ‘bestows honorary degrees on people who are outstanding in an area consonant to its mission’.
There are two degree ceremonies, in January and July, and an oration commending each graduand.

Professor of paediatrics at the university, Adam Finn, gave Steve's oration and said: "When Steve decided to find out more about the disease that had taken Spencer, he was astonished by how little people knew, including the medical profession.

"Realising there was important work to be done, he channelled his energy into developing and providing better information and peer-support to other similarly affected parents.

"Among his many achievements, Steve has walked the equivalent of halfway around the world to raise over £2 million through marathon walks alone."

Spencer’s case “baffled” the doctors and he died within 24 hours of admission to Southmead Hospital.

Steve said: “We were heartbroken and consumed by shock and emptiness – one minute he was here, the next – gone.

“I held Spencer – the devastation and void is something I’ll never forget.

“His death completely changed my life.”

Steve, then 34, remembers “tickling Spencer’s cheek to make him laugh – all the while unaware he was dying” – a thought that spurs him on.

He only dreamed of driving lorries when he left school at 14, and owned a family-run haulage business.

Spencer’s passing saw Steve, his wife Gloria and a few friends start their campaign.

The dad remembers ‘experts’ of the time saying he would not see any meningitis vaccines in his lifetime, but vaccines to combat Hib, Pneumococcal disease and Meningitis C are free on the NHS.

The vaccine for Meningitis B, the most common form of bacterial meningitis in the UK, was approved for the NHS, subject to price negotiations, in March.

Steve said: “Initially I was astonished by how little people knew about the disease, including the medical profession.

“It was startling to discover no leaflets, no charities and no help available.

“We felt alone – something had to be done because we wanted to protect others from the horrendous pain of losing a loved one.

“I wanted to do something Spencer would be proud of and never expected to make the strides we’ve made.”

Steve left the haulage business in Gloria’s hands, and launched the Motorways Meningitis Appeal out of a Portakabin on his lorry park off the A38 Alveston.

He started studying the disease and travelling across the country to conferences.

It was not until the ‘Stroud meningitis outbreak’ in the mid-1980s that Steve and Gloria met others touched by the disease.

Steve brought meningitis to a national audience by appearing on BBC Breakfast Time TV presented by Frank Bough in 1986.
This was the first time Steve’s phone rang constantly, hearing from people across the country.

He chose to prioritise visiting families touched by meningitis, something he still does today, and has always been available 24-7 by phone to anyone needing his help.

Steve said: “Over the years, I have met thousands of families who have experienced a similar tragedy.

“I encourage them to fundraise to help create a better knowledge of meningitis and its associated diseases.

“Most families who have suffered find it helpful, like me, to do something positive.

“If we unite and do all we can – we will make a difference.”

At a conference in London in 1991, Steve heard a Norwegian scientist describe the now famous tumbler test, which had never been mass promoted.

Impressed, Steve asked for the literature and had it translated into a leaflet in English.

The breakthrough test hit national headlines after Steve promoted it with Esther Rantzen on the BBC’s That’s Life! TV show in 1994.

He said: “I saw the tumbler test and was amazed at how a simple glass could be used to help diagnose septicaemia, the blood poisoning form of meningitis.

“I was proud to promote the idea over here and am overjoyed it has become a lifesaving tool.”

Being fit, Steve took on charity marathon walks, which often involved 40 days walking on end and routes such as John o’Groats to Land’s End.

An example of Steve’s spirit is when he visited the doctor with “tomato-sized blisters” after an early long-distance walk.

The doctor said the easiest way to get rid of them was to give up the walks, but Steve said ‘being told to stop made me more determined to carry on’.

The fundraiser has since raised more than £2 million from marathon walks alone, amassing over 12,000 miles.

It dawned on Steve that awareness would have had little effect in Spencer’s case.

So he decided to dramatically change his crusade towards funding vaccine research and in the late-1990s chose to forge Spencer Dayman Meningitis UK.

To donate or for more information, visit www.MeningitisNow.org.

- Meningitis Now needs bold people to brave the Bristol Half Marathon on Sunday, September 21.

The 13.1-mile race starts and finishes at the historic harbourside, goes under Brunel’s iconic Suspension Bridge and past impressive Avon Gorge.

The charity has guaranteed places, but independent runners can also join the team.

Minimum sponsorship is £150.
Meningitis Now provides full support, a free running vest or T-shirt, and information pack including tips on how to prepare.

To sign up, call 01453 768000 or email LizG@meningitisnow.org.

ENDS

Photo Caption(s):
Steve Grad a – "HONOURED" MAN: Steve with his honorary degree
Steve Grad b – THE DR: Steve with Professor Adam Finn, left, and Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Eric Thomas
Steve Grad c – SUPPORTIVE WIFE: Steve with wife Gloria Dayman
Steve Grad d – PROUD FAMILY: Steve and wife Gloria Dayman with extended family

The below are available upon request:

Spencer Dayman a – NEVER FORGOTTEN: Spencer Dayman
Spencer Dayman b – PROUD PARENT: Steve Dayman cuddles baby Spencer
Steve D a – STARTING OUT: Steve Dayman starting his crusade outside the family haulage business in the early 1980s
Steve D b – HUMBLE BEGINNINGS: The portable building that housed Steve Dayman’s early meningitis charity, circa 1983
Steve D c – CREDIT Coleraine Chronicle – YOUNG HELPER: Steve Dayman with Louise Greer (centre), of Coleraine, NI; who lost her legs and part of her arm to meningitis aged two. Photo circa 2002
Steve D d – REST STOP: Steve Dayman taking a well-earned rest during a Giant’s Causeway walk, Antrim, NI
Steve D e – GRAND OPENING: Steve and Gloria Dayman launch the Spencer Dayman Meningitis Laboratories at the University of Bristol in 2002, with their family
Steve D f - CREDIT Derbyshire Times – TEAM WORK: Steve Dayman and dedicated fundraisers, circa 2005
Steve D g – UNITED FRONT: Steve Dayman (right) with avid supporters, starting a Bath to Bristol walk
Steve D h - CREDIT Sunderland Echo – SPREADING AWARENESS: Steve Dayman and supporters help spread awareness
Steve D i – MENINGITIS EXPERT: Steve Dayman spreads awareness with info materials

Steve D j – STILL SUPPORTING: Steve Dayman and an older Louise Greer help spread awareness

Steve D k – ROYAL RECOGNITION: Steve Dayman received an MBE for his efforts in 2010, with wife Gloria

Steve D l – ON THE ROAD: Steve Dayman still on the road, dedicated to the meningitis fight

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Meningitis and Septicaemia Facts

- Meningitis is usually caused by bacteria or viruses
- Meningitis is inflammation of the membranes that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord
- Septicaemia is blood poisoning
- Some bacteria that cause meningitis also cause septicaemia
- Meningitis and septicaemia often happen together – it is vital to know all the signs and symptoms
- The early signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia can be similar to ‘flu and include fever, headache, nausea, vomiting and muscle pain.
- The more specific signs and symptoms include fever with cold hands and feet, drowsiness, confusion, pale blotchy skin, stiff neck, dislike of bright lights and a rash which doesn’t fade under pressure.
- In babies, symptoms can also include being floppy and unresponsive, dislike of being handled, rapid breathing, an unusual, moaning cry and a bulging fontanelle (soft spot on the top of the head).
- There are an estimated 3,400 cases of bacterial meningitis and septicaemia each year in the UK.
- Following bacterial meningitis or septicaemia, one in ten people will die and at least a third of survivors will be left with lifelong after-effects such as hearing loss, epilepsy, limb loss or learning difficulties
- Meningitis and septicaemia can affect anyone, of any age, at any time. However, babies and young children are most at risk, and young people between 15 – 24 years are also a higher risk group.
- In the past 20 years, effective vaccines have been developed to give protection against SOME types of meningitis. These are offered to all babies and young children as part of the UK childhood immunisation programme. BUT there are not vaccines to protect against ALL types.
- In January 2013, a vaccine to protect against Meningitis B, the most common cause of bacterial meningitis and septicaemia, was licensed for use in Europe. In March 2014, this vaccine was recommended for routine use in the UK childhood immunisation programme, provided a cost-effective vaccine price can be agreed.
If you suspect someone may be ill with meningitis or septicaemia, trust your instincts and get immediate medical help.

For more information visit www.MeningitisNow.org or call the meningitis helpline 0808 80 10 388

About Meningitis Now

Meningitis Now, the UK’s largest charity fighting the disease, formed after Meningitis UK and Meningitis Trust merged in April 2013.

The newly united charity, with around 30 years’ experience exists to save lives and rebuild futures – through research, awareness and support.

Meningitis Now fights the disease on all fronts by providing a powerful, united voice for people fighting meningitis.

- Saving lives by funding vaccine and preventative research.
- Reducing the disease’s impact through awareness.
- Rebuilding futures with dedicated support.
- Fundraising to deliver our plans.