

## **Professor Frank A. Billson AO, Censor-in-Chief of the Australian College of Ophthalmologists, 1978 – 1982.**

In 1977 Frank Billson, a Melbourne graduate and practising ophthalmologist in that city, accepted the appointment as Foundation Professor of Clinical Ophthalmology at the University of Sydney. Already an active Fellow of the College, he proceeded to make a major contribution to the work and development of the College. From 2009 he is Emeritus Professor Clinical Ophthalmology at the University of Sydney.

Frank was educated at the Melbourne Church of England Grammar School and graduated in medicine from the University of Melbourne in 1958. After working at the Alfred Hospital he travelled to England where he gained a Diploma in Ophthalmology in London in 1962. He was admitted as a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons Edinburgh in 1965; the Royal College of Surgeons London in 1966; the Royal College of Australasian Surgeons in 1966; and Fellow of the Australian College of Ophthalmologists in 1975. He became a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons in 1977; Fellow American Academy of Ophthalmology in 1978; and Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists when it was given the Royal assent in 1978.

Professor Billson's service and involvement in the College has spanned many years, having served on the Qualification and Education Committee and as Censor-in-Chief, the Editorial Committee, the Council and as President, and on the Orthoptic Board of Australia. He has given his time to the College in a selfless manner and served the College with distinction to raise the prominence of the College amongst its peers. His work in basic ophthalmological research and his service to the underprivileged overseas, particularly in Bangladesh and more recently in East Timor, has added to the College's prestige and reputation.

Amongst many contributions to community roles, he was Foundation Director of the Save Sight Institute, Sydney; is on the Board of Directors of the Save Sight Institute and the Ophthalmic Research Institute of Australia (ORIA); is Director of the Lions NSW Eye Bank; Life Governor of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind; Board Member and Chairman of Foresight Australia; the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB); Member of the International Academy of Ophthalmology; Council Member representing Australia on the Asia Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology; Patron of the Orthoptic Association of Australia; Patron of the Ophthalmic Nurses Association of Australia; Director on Australian National Board of St John Ambulance Australia Council; and Chairman of Sight for Life Foundation. He is also chair of the Sydney Eye Hospital Registrar Training Committee; Chair of the Development Committee for Sydney Eye Hospital; Consultant Ophthalmologist at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital; and Consultant Ophthalmologist at Sydney Children's Hospital.

Frank was appointed Censor-in-Chief in 1978-1982, having served on the Court of Examiners, RACS for the conjoint exam (RACS/RACO) 1974-1982 and Chairman of the Surgical Board (Ophthalmology) RACS 1978-1982. He was a member of the Qualification and Education Committee (QEC) of RACO from 1973-1983, and representative on the Combined Education Committee of Clinical Colleges 1980-1983.

During his term as Censor-in-Chief:

- The QEC accepted as axiomatic that to ensure the highest possible standards the principal function of the College must always be education at the academic, clinical and ethical level for medical undergraduates, ophthalmological registrars, ophthalmologists, and general practitioners;
- The QEC was structured formally in three parts comprising Qualifications, Exams and Continuing Education: Qualifications covered training, appraisals of educational objectives, and implementation of QEC Policy; Continuing Education encompassed the AJO, refresher workshops and seminars, and self-assessment programs;
- A survey revealed that the majority of Fellows considered referrals from GPs reflected inadequate training of undergraduates and that the College increase its commitment to undergraduate

education, and do more for the continuing education of general practitioners by organising periodical seminars in each State and ask the RACGP to include ophthalmology sessions in their seminars;

- Biophysics for Ophthalmologists was published, the principal architect being James Rogers in conjunction with the QEC, and it became required reading for the Ophthalmology Basic Sciences;
- The three-year training period for ophthalmological registrars was considered to be satisfactory although consideration was given to a four-year training period and the desirability of further training of registrars in the various sub-specialties of ophthalmology was examined;
- State QECs were made more responsible for organising and supervising the training of registrars, including the number and location of training posts;
- Strongly coordinated training programs with the OSNZ were implemented with reciprocity of training posts and interchange of trainees;
- The RACO/RACS Conjoint Final Exams became formalised and RACO was responsible for examining in New Zealand by sharing written papers and sharing one or more examiners in Vivas;
- Candidates successful at the Conjoint Final Examination would not be eligible for Fellowship of the College unless they had completed six years' training in full-time training posts, of which three years were in pre-vocational training, i.e. one intern year + two in hospital residency or one of which could be in research, then three years in ophthalmology training;
- 1980 was the first year that the College started inspections of training posts. Following inspections, those posts considered to be inadequate would be designated as service posts. Training posts were to be inspected every three years;
- It was decided that the College should not accept any doctor as a candidate for any of its examinations unless they possessed the basic medical qualifications equivalent of the AMEC, agreed by the State and Territory Medical Boards;
- It was also agreed that stricter control over the admission into Australia and the accreditation of foreign doctors was required. Conceding written papers to holders of overseas Fellowships was withdrawn. The OSNZ was in agreement that only those candidates with the UK Surgical Fellowship in Ophthalmology in conjunction with the higher Surgical Training Certificate would be granted exemptions in the final Fellowship exam;
- Annual programs for Continuing Education were to include not only the annual scientific congress but also seminars, refresher courses and self-assessment programs. The American Academy of Ophthalmology books were in great demand and the RANZCO/RVEEH Conjoint Library developed a Library of AAO TV Tapes ;
- These up-date CE activities were to be spaced throughout the year and held in different places to enable as many Fellows as possible to attend, even if this meant setting up a special committee to organise them;
- A philosophy in respect of re-certification was developed;
- It was agreed that the College should be seen to take a leading role in national and international campaigns aimed at better vision and prevention of blindness, such as the Trachoma Program;
- It was also agreed that there should be more ophthalmological research in Australia and that the College should encourage manufacturers and suppliers of ophthalmic equipment and visual aids to provide funds for research, preferably organised and controlled by the College. The College should take steps to establish a research arm through an Ophthalmic Foundation into which deductible donations could be made by Fellows, by industry and by philanthropists.

NB: You will find his Presidential profile in that section from when he subsequently served as President from 1987 to 1988