

Ray Frank Whitford, President of the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists, 1986 - 1987

Ray Whitford was born on 18 April 1929 in Perth, WA. He was educated at Nedlands Primary School from 1935 to 1939, and Scots College from 1940 to 1946. He gained entrance to the University of WA in 1947, then Adelaide University from 1948 to 1953 where he graduated with MB BS in 1953 and returned WA to Fremantle Hospital from 1954 to 1956. After one year in General Practice he worked at the RVEEH from 1958 to 1960, graduating with a Diploma of Ophthalmology (DO) from Melbourne University in 1960 and returned to WA to practise ophthalmology from 1961 to 2002. He was an Honorary Ophthalmologist at Royal Perth Hospital from 1961 to 1965 and Honorary Ophthalmologist at Fremantle Hospital from 1961 to 1991. He was admitted as a Member of the Australian College of Ophthalmologists (MACO) when it was established in 1969 and a Fellow of the RACS and RACO in 1977. During his long career he was Chairman of the Fremantle Hospital Clinical Staff and Board representative; Member of the Board of Lions Eye Institute; RACO State Branch Secretary; and State representative on Federal Council of the College.

During his term as President, continuing education activities attracted a great deal of support with visiting Professors sponsored by companies in the ophthalmic industry. Lawrie Hirst took up his position as Professor of Ophthalmology at the Queensland University and made major contributions towards postgraduate and undergraduate teaching, while Professor Crock, who was appointed as the first Chair in Ophthalmology established in Australia, retired from the Chair in Melbourne. Dr Ken Howsam was nominated as the first recipient of the College Medal, awarded to Fellows who have given years of distinguished, meritorious and selfless service to the College. The NSW Medical Eye Service building at 27 Commonwealth Street, Sydney, was gifted to the College by the Ophthalmic Association Limited of NSW. Raids by the Federal Police and Health Insurance Commission representatives on 15 ophthalmic practices and optical dispensing firms took place in Queensland and although what prompted the raids or what the alleged offences were, were not clear, and following the President's objections to the Prime Minister and others, the warrants were overturned but no apologies were forthcoming. The rebate for Cataract/Implant procedures was reduced by almost 40% in the May mini-budget and representatives from the College met with the Permanent Head of the Health Department to point out the ramifications of the decision: the College was invited to present a further submission to justify restoration of the rebate level. A number of Fellows decided that they were not prepared to perform the cataract/implant surgery on veterans at the reduced rate, and as a result a large number of veterans had to return to the Repatriation Hospital system, thus lengthening the waiting lists at those hospitals. Through efforts by the Public Relations Committee in focusing media attention on the cataract/implant rebate issue, it became an election issue and a public relations consultant was commissioned to assist with continuing the campaign. The College presented a detailed submission to the Federal Government's Medical Education and Medical Manpower Inquiry under the Chairmanship of Professor Doherty but were horrified by the terms submitted by the optometrists, and the College made its views on that submission clear to Professor Doherty. The NSW Health Department planned an "Ophthalmic Enhancement Program" to redevelop the Sydney Eye Hospital and to create new academic appointments at Westmead, Royal North Shore Hospital, Newcastle and Sydney Eye Hospital, and the four-year vocational training program commenced with the fourth year allowing more flexibility with unsupervised experience, field work in remote areas and other countries, and research, being considered on their merits. Negotiations with the RACP with a view to establishing a conjoint training program were postponed for a period of two years, while considerable uniformity was achieved between the RACO and the OSNZ in their approach to

training and examinations whilst respecting their individuality and special needs. The Policies and Priorities Committee was established following the wind-up of the Medical Planning Committee and issues considered included ophthalmological manpower, relationships with other groups, and problems with the medico-political aspects of ophthalmic practice.

As President in the 19th year of the College, in his Address, Ray Whitford reflected on the past, present, and future of the College. After giving a brief introduction on the Ophthalmological Society of Australia's efforts to establish a College, Ray proceeded to outline the benefits this had brought with Professors of Ophthalmology in five States. He reflected that without these University Chairs in Ophthalmology, the majority of aspiring Ophthalmologists would be doing their basic training overseas with the loss of impetus that comes from teaching, and the cost effective peer review ensuring high standards in the profession by the enquiring minds of registrars in training.

Ray lauded the Lions Clubs of Australia in their appetite to fight against blindness and the role they had played in the establishment in WA of the second Chair of Ophthalmology, followed by Flinders in SA, and Queensland, and their continued support in other States with developing diagnostic and treatment facilities. He also acknowledged the Australian Foundation for the Prevention of Blindness which works independently but in close liaison with the Lions Clubs. He reflected on the deteriorating facilities in the teaching hospitals and that eye health had suffered the fiscal attacks by government along with other public services, and that College members must accept the responsibility for the maintenance of eye care.

Technological advances in eye care over the previous five years had not been added to the public facilities and work was redirected to private rooms to use the facilities: equipment in public institutions was old and unreliable while the bureaucrats viewed high technology as making eye surgery much easier.

He acknowledged Professor Ian Constable as the first Australian ophthalmologist to be invited to give the Norman McAlister Gregg Lecture and encouraged the idea of other Australian ophthalmologists along with others from the world stage to be so feted in the future. He announced that Ken Howsam would be awarded the first College Medal for his dedicated service to the College, and for the future he announced that Council was considering a permanent home for the College; that OPSM had provided funds for a young ophthalmologist to study overseas every three years; that the Ulverscroft foundation of England had provided a large grant which was amortised to provide a scholarship every four years; and that Sigma Ophthalmics had offered \$10,000 per year for a further scholarship for international experience.

In ending, he reminded Fellows that they had two responsibilities: the first and greatest to the sick and those who could not afford private health care; and second to the College because without it Australian ophthalmology would not flourish and he commended the army of helpers who gave their time to participate as examiners, on qualification and education committees, editorial committee for the journals, State committees, and Federal Council and its sub-committees, to keep the College growing. He quoted Ken Howsam in saying: "I remain firm in my belief, that every member of the College owes a duty to contribute to at least one of the many facets of the College, and that the number of members so involved, is a measure of the prosperity of the College.