Dr John Byrne Murchland

Censor-in-Chief of the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists (1987–1990)

Dr John Murchland was born at Jamestown in South Australia on 26 May 1930. He graduated in Medicine at Adelaide University in 1954, and after several years in country general practice he trained in Melbourne where he qualified for a Diploma of Ophthalmology (DO) in 1960. Dr Murchland was a Captain in the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps from 1955 to 1967, and he set up in private practice in North Terrace, Adelaide and at Mount Barker in the Adelaide Hills. John was a founding member of the Australian College of Ophthalmologist at its inception and following further studies at the Wilmer Institute and other Retinal Centres he established the Retinal Clinic at the Royal Adelaide Hospital in 1967 where he introduced photocoagulation and vitrectomy. Under College auspices, he organised the first Australia-wide Laser Photocoagulation courses and practical workshops in Adelaide in 1977, and subsequently by invitation for Southeast Asia, in Singapore.

John served on the College Council from 1970 to 1980 and the Qualification and Education Committee (QEC) from 1981 to 1987, during which time he was also an examiner for the Part II Fellowship Examinations. With a constructive interest in education, a passion for teaching, a talent in organisation and in the assessment of the competence of the young trainees he further served the College as Censor-in-Chief from 1987 to 1990. Here he worked on training programs, the introduction of new initiatives in training and qualification, and anticipated the future needs of Continuing Education. John was College representative and subsequently Chairman of the Combined Education Committee of the Clinical Colleges for three years and also served on the Board of the ORIA for twelve years before he became a member of a Panel of Inspectors of training posts.

As a member of an Australian team rotating over three years, he lectured in Eye disease and trained local doctors to perform cataract surgery in Bangladesh, and presented papers in Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia. He also paid regular clinical visits to several outback Aboriginal communities up until his retirement in 1999.

During his term as Censor-in-Chief:

- The requirements for training in the third year were broadened to experience in general practice, research or teaching would be accepted as an alternative to a supervised hospital post.
- A fourth-year vocational training period was introduced and some of the training posts dedicated to this.
- A requirement for research during training was introduced: full-time research, presentation of a paper at a meeting, publication of a paper, or a written dissertation were accepted to fulfil the requirement.

- Dr Ken Howsam provided an inspection protocol for the inspection of training posts.
- A system of progressive assessment of trainees was established in which supervisors submitted a report at the end of each term.
- The Ulverscroft Fellowship (Scholarship) was established to fund a senior trainee to study in the UK.
- A Sigma Fellowship (Scholarship) was established to allow a Fellow or senior trainee to undertake a period of study in Australia or overseas.
- A working party prepared a submission for an Enquiry into Medical Education and the Workforce.
- A professional survey of Fellows' requirements for Continuing Education was carried out and a new program developed from evaluation of the responses.
- Closer communication between the Annual Scientific Committee and the QEC were proposed.

In 2006, John was presented with The Distinguished Service Award in recognition of his significant contribution to ophthalmology, especially for services to the College, the community and to medicine. He was inspirational in the commitment, energy and wisdom he brought to the training, qualification and education areas of the College, and his professionalism enhanced the standing of the College and of ophthalmology.

John is father to four children, and he enjoys his spare time on his hobby farm.