

Andrew Stewart, President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists, 2006 – 2007

Andrew David Halsted Stewart was born in Perth, WA on 5 June 1942. He was educated at Nedlands State Primary School, and Christ Church Grammar Secondary School. He gained his MBBS from the University of WA in 1967 and became a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists in 1987. He was a Foundation Fellow of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists in 1974. Andrew is a Fellow of the American Academy of Ophthalmologists; a member of the European Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgeons; a member of the Australian Medical Association; and a member of the Australian society of Aerospace Medicine. Andrew was Secretary of the WA Branch from 1992 to 1993 and Chair of the Branch from 1994 to 1997. He was a College Council member from 1994 to 2007, serving on the Executive from 1997 to 2002 and the Board from 2002 to 2007. Andrew is based at 10 Churchill Avenue, Subiaco, WA. He is a General Ophthalmologist, and has a special interest in Cataract Surgery, Glaucoma, Glaucoma Surgery and Laser Surgery. He speaks some German and some French as well as English.

Andrew's term in office was a significant and positive year for the College with:

- The completion of the accreditation process by the Australian Medical Council with the College given accreditation for five years and up to a further five years subject to satisfactory ongoing annual reports, which was a tribute to the transparency of documents and promulgated processes in the overall integrity of the implementation of the vocational training program, continuing professional development and overseas trained specialist assessment process;
- With the retirement of Dr Frank Taylor as Inspector of Training Posts, training post accreditation passed on to four inspection teams;
- Fellows' participation in continuing professional development with making practice improvements accompanied by an audit, as a condition of Fellowship of the College;
- Continued favourable international comment for the high standard of the College's scientific journal, *Clinical and Experimental Ophthalmology*;
- Continued raising of the profile of ophthalmology through the Media Awards, and by Fellows who regularly travelled to rural and remote areas of Australia to provide services to those not easily able to access specialist care, and to overseas countries to provide assistance under the auspices of various programs;
- The matter of legislation giving optometrists access to a varying range of therapeutic medications being subject to ongoing discussions with Governments and other stakeholders, and keeping the lines of communication open with optometrists so that the interests of the community were best served;
- Maintenance of Strong support for the advocacy roles undertaken by Vision 2020 Australia, and with the Parliamentary Friends Group, which helped to establish firm networks and entrée to the political system;
- Conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding for mutual support with Vision Australia, the largest provider of services to people who are blind or vision-impaired;
- Provision of incentives to trainers by awarding ten *Excellence in Training* awards to supervisors nominated by their trainees;
- Provision of clinical and technical advice to the NSW Government for the production of an eye safety video for RailCorp employees;
- Introduction of two associate member categories, i.e. Ophthalmic Practice Managers and International Trainees;
- Introduction of the weekly e-mail newsletter *Academy Express* in conjunction with the American Academy of Ophthalmology;
- The review of infection control guidelines in conjunction with NSW Health and Ophthalmology Indicators and with the Australian Council of Healthcare Standards (ACHS);
- Evaluation of the Behavioural Capability Assessment process; and
- Continued refinement to procedures and processes in all the main areas of operations.

Andrew titled his Presidential address as "Everything we do is directed to improving the quality of a person's life" and he began by addressing the graduating Fellows, their families and teachers, outlining the journey that had brought them to the granting of privileges and benefits of Fellowship of the College.

Andrew informed the audience that ophthalmologists are indeed a privileged branch of the medical guild in that they are shielded from many moral dilemmas and their focus is on improving the quality of a person's life. He commented on the advances that had taken place in ophthalmology in relation to cataract surgery and implanted intra-ocular lenses and the continuing advances in refractive surgery. He spoke about diabetic retinopathy being treated effectively to prevent blindness, with the incidence of diabetes increasing at an alarming rate due largely to changes in diet and lifestyle. The understanding and treatment of macular degeneration was another condition he spoke of in which advances had been made, but much more needed to be done to ensure that the advances are enjoyed by all sectors of society.

He advised that responsibilities also came with privileges, and he reminded the audience of the Oath taken by Fellows which affirms their resolve to act always as the patient's advocates and in their best interests: communication and collaboration with others, and retaining a sense of humility was an integral part of this. Andrew expanded on advocacy in that it involved ensuring that the limited resources allocated to eye care reach their intended target and are not dissipated through administrative inefficiency or misinformation: that they had a responsibility to the community by being cognizant of the costs and benefits of interventions to both patients and to the community in general. And he reminded the audience that they had a responsibility to their profession to freely impart the knowledge and skill they had gained to those following in their footsteps, citing that Henry Kelsall from the Royal Navy, prior to studying ophthalmology at Moorfields Eye Hospital, had emigrated to WA in 1890 where he was the first to undertake cataract surgery.

Andrew used reference to the Navy to make his point regarding discipline which is one of the fundamentals of self-regulation, of which the medical profession has been exemplary in the past, but he offered that there appeared to be moves to change this with various proposals for increasing external intervention. He referred to 'those with inadequate training for the competence they claim' and advised that appropriate medical eye treatment can only be delivered with a full understanding of the human body and its physiological, pathological and pharmacological processes. He articulated that the College's view was that modern comprehensive eye care was best delivered with each professional contributing their own special skills as part of the eye care team but within the limits of their competence and training.

Another aspect Andrew spoke about was the proposal to move the responsibility for specialist medical education away from the Colleges which have managed it through the goodwill and generous donation of time and effort of the Fellows, notwithstanding the significant cost this would entail, and the acquisition of skills which cannot be taught didactically in the classroom. He advised that the education and training program of the College was internationally recognised to be at the forefront of postgraduate medical education and that for any Government to tamper with it would be foolhardy: but all Colleges have the responsibility to ensure that the training of a Specialist is as efficient and cost-effective as possible.

In concluding his speech, Andrew referred to the extraordinary advances in the profession and for this to continue, regulation must be kept in check so that individual initiative, curiosity and enthusiasm is not stifled but is encouraged to flourish. He wished the graduates well and encouraged them to take the opportunity to work in the more remote areas, which are both challenging and rewarding; as well as to take an active part in College affairs, including the female graduates, either through teaching, on Branch Committees, or the College Council and Board.

In his spare time Andrew is a classical pianist and flies his own aeroplane to his farming property near Busselton in WA. He is a member of the Royal Aero Club of WA; a member of the North Cottesloe Surf Life Saving Club; a member of Royal Agricultural Society of WA; a member of the Buffalo Industry Council; a past member of the National Board of *Musica Viva*; a past member of the Board of Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts; a member of the Weld Club in Perth; and a past Chairman of the Advisory Committee of the WA Conservatorium of Music.