

James Ewen Kirkwood (Dick) Galbraith OBE, President of the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists, 1985 - 1986

Dick Galbraith was born on 30 September 1931 at Geelong, Victoria. He graduated in medicine from the University of Melbourne in 1955 and gained his FRCS in 1963, FRACS in 1967, MACO in 1969 and FRACO in 1978, FACTM in 1994. He was a Resident Medical Officer at the Alfred Hospital from 1956 to 1958 before travelling to the UK in 1959 where he worked at the Sussex Eye Hospital prior to becoming a Research Assistant to Sir Stewart Duke-Elder at the Institute of Ophthalmology at Moorfields Eye Hospital, London from 1960 to 1963 and Registrar then Senior Medical Officer there. In 1964 he lectured at the Institute then took up the Lawford Travelling Scholarship to Essen, Germany, and then the Harkness Travelling Fellowship to Centres in the USA, before returning to Victoria.

On his return to Australia, from 1964 to 1987 Dick held positions in ophthalmology at Melbourne University, the Peter McCallum Clinic, and the Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH) where he became Head of the Eye Department. He served on the RACO Federal Council from 1976 to 1986 and was Chairman of the Victorian Branch from 1977 to 1978. From 1972 to 1981 he was a member of the RACS Court of Examiners and taught microsurgical courses in Melbourne, Singapore, and New Zealand, and was Visiting Professor and Guest Lecturer in the USA in 1983. He also provided services to the Pacific Region from 1978 to 1985. He was the foremost corneal transplantation surgeon in Melbourne for almost twenty years and successfully organised the eye donor system at the RMH, prior to the introduction of the Lion's Eye Bank. From 1985 to 1995 he was Chairman of the Australian South Pacific Eye Care Teams (ASPECT) Foundation, organising Basic Ophthalmology Courses in nine Pacific Countries. He was also involved in services to Aboriginal and Rural Eye Health, including the National Trachoma and Eye Health Program, the Broken Hill Base Hospital and Far West Health Region of NSW, and was appointed Chair of the College's Committee in 1995. Apart from all this he served on the RAAMC Army Reserve as Lieutenant Colonel Ophthalmic Consultant, Third Military District from 1978 to 1985, then as full Colonel from 1985 to 1991 as Consultant Ophthalmologist to the Army Office in Canberra, and was made Honorary Colonel, RAAMC, Third Military Division in 1992.

During his term as President, a new initiative was introduced by him for agenda items for the Council meetings to be identified as "to be discussed" or "to be noted, and this effectively reduced the work-load on Councillors and members of Executive thus negating the need for additional meetings. The 17th Annual Scientific Congress was held in Hong Kong, attended by a large number of visitors; Frank Billson delivered the Council Lecture entitled "The Science of Ophthalmology" which aroused a great deal of discussion and Margaret Wilson retired. Royal North Shore Hospital and Newcastle Hospital had their accreditation for training posts removed as the result of the medical-political crisis in hospitals the previous year, while negotiations continued with the Royal Australasian College of Physicians with the object of establishing a joint training scheme. Cross-representation on the QECs brought closer ties between the RACO and the OSNZ and the new Conjoint Surgical Board in Ophthalmology proved to be a medium for most useful exchange of ideas in the areas of training and certification between the RACS and the RACO. The first article from the Therapeutics Committee was published in the journal while the Anomalies Committee reported that the Commonwealth Government Department of Health had agreed to pay equal benefits for all MBS items in all States with the fee being set at the highest fee currently paid in any State. The NSW Consumer Affairs Department asked for research into Luggage Strap Injuries which was promptly acted upon, while following a Fireworks Safety Appeal it appeared likely that fireworks would be banned in NSW. A syndicated nationwide release was presented on Irlen Coloured Lenses, while articles on Colour Blindness and on Extended Wear of Contact Lenses appeared in Women's Magazines. The control of the National Trachoma and Eye Health Program had passed from the Federal Department of Health to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the College sought advice from the latter on how the assets should be disposed of in keeping with the terms of the regulations, and with the disbandment of the Committee the College's formal association with the program was brought to a close.

In opening his Presidential Address, Dick warned that Medicine faced a time of crisis but that times of crisis offer opportunity for planning new initiatives and to quietly dispose of techniques and attitudes which are no longer appropriate. He advised the audience that Universities were becoming emasculated by economic and political pressures and academic ophthalmology needed to be extended beyond the confines of the teaching institutions into private practice and the community, but the use of private patients for teaching would need to be introduced slowly. He attributed the increased numbers of cataract operations to an aging population and a refinement of the surgical techniques of lens implantation. In those days there was increasing pressure for cataract operations to be performed as an outpatient procedure. He forewarned that unless the highest professional standards were maintained, from a strong academic background, ophthalmology ran the risk of joining dentistry as a vital profession but peripheral to major concerns of medicine. He saw the massive bed closures in Victorian teaching hospitals and the withdrawal of senior staff in NSW and junior consultants in WA as watering down training and inadvertently denigrating the profession. He promoted sending the elite graduates overseas to expose them to different medical cultures, techniques and attitudes and heralded the introduction of a scholarship by OPSM (now AMO) to allow an Australian to enter one of the great training institutions of Europe or America. He saw these graduates returning with new skills and a new outlook and this would assist in the College maintaining the high standards it had laboured for over the 18 years since its inception. He explained that the College had sent Geoff Harley to America, Canada and Europe to examine ophthalmic health care systems and from Geoff's reports the College was able to develop policies that had some influence on the deliberations of the government. The Policies and Priorities Committee was set up to develop long term strategies for the delivery of eye health care instead of *ad-hoc* reactions to government interventions, and to set future goals for the College. Another major problem he foreshadowed was the probable shortage of ophthalmologists in the future and he envisaged the development of an ophthalmic stream within general medicine to enable an attack to be made on non-surgical causes of blindness, such as diabetes. The restructuring of the AMA was another concern: to develop from a State-based colonial relic of the British Medical Association to a federal body, otherwise membership would continue to diminish. He advised that without a unified voice government would not take seriously advice from doctors on the provision of health care. He addressed the rising costs of health care and attributed this, not to doctors activities but to the falling value of the dollar. Finally he returned to the importance of teaching hospitals and warned that the profession could not afford to lose any more teachers on whom depended the standards of care and quality of the profession. He was concerned that if the number of consultants continued to fall the government would force doctors back into the public system by manipulating the underpinnings of private practice.

Throughout his professional life, Dick Galbraith worked to better the eye health of those in need and achieved this, not only by his diagnostic and surgical acumen but by passing on his skills to a whole generation of ophthalmologists and health workers both in Australia and overseas. In 1976 he was awarded an OBE for his services to international relations and medicine and in 1995 he was awarded the College Gold Medal for his years of distinguished meritorious and selfless service to the College. He was the third Fellow to be awarded this prestigious Medal, having been preceded by Ken Howsam and Fred Hollows.

Dick enjoys travel and belongs to the Melbourne Rotary Club and the Royal Melbourne Tennis Club.