

Edgar (Eddie) John Donaldson AO, President of the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists, 1978 - 1979

Eddie was born on 13 November 1920 and died on 13 May 2000. He is father to son Craig, and three daughters. He was one of the first ophthalmologists to be fully trained in Australia, having gained his MB BS in 1943 and was resident medical officer at Sydney Hospital from 1943 to 1944, and first ophthalmic registrar from 1945 to 1949. He gained his DO (Syd) in 1947; FRACS in 1967 and FRACO in 1978. He was an Honorary Ophthalmic Surgeon at Sydney Eye Hospital from 1950 to 1985, being Chairman of Staff from 1979 to 1985.

Eddie was very active in the Ophthalmological Society of NSW and the OSA, and later a founding member of the College. He was Secretary of the ORIA from 1966 to 1969; gave the Council Lecture to the OSA in 1968; Director of Ophthalmic Studies and Eye Health at Sydney University from 1970 to 1977; first Chairman of the Conjoint Part II Examinations; and served for 18 months as President of the College from 1978 to 1979.

The Retinal Unit at Sydney Eye Hospital was started by Eddie in 1952, when retinal detachment surgery was often a failure due to poor understanding and poor surgical techniques of the time. He reversed this trend and greatly improved the success rate of retinal detachment surgery there. In 1960 Dr Donaldson worked in Europe and America improving his surgical skills in retinal detachment techniques and commenced the training of retinal registrars in Sydney in 1964. From 1969 he was a member of the Jules Gonin Club which represents a worldwide group of leaders in the treatment of retinal disease. He established laser treatment and this, combined with the development of fluorescein angiography after a visit to the USA in 1965, resulted in the retinal vascular service within the Department of Ophthalmology of the Sydney University.

He was very active in the planning and rebuilding of the Sydney Eye Hospital at the Woolloomooloo site, incorporating adequate facilities to establish a Chair in Ophthalmology. He then assisted in the appointment of Frank Billson as full professor to the Chair of Ophthalmology of the University of Sydney in 1977, thus handing over to him his role as Director of the Department there. The Sydney Eye Foundation was also Eddie's brain child.

During his term as President:

- the College Office was renovated and remodelled from the Medical Eye Service of NSW building and Margaret Wilson helped to build the College to its then stature;
- an Ad Hoc Committee was set up to look into the College's long term aims and objectives which were to become guidelines for the future;
- Frank Billson formalised the Conjoint Examinations with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) as well as organising strongly coordinated training programs with the Ophthalmology Society of New Zealand (OSNZ), with reciprocity of training posts and interchange of trainees: the College was responsible for the Conjoint Examinations and for examining in New Zealand.
- the Annual Scientific Congress and State Branch Meetings provided opportunities for Continuing Education with Seminars and Workshops on Contact Lenses, Microsurgery, Laser Therapy, Strabismus, Vitreous surgery and Paediatric Ophthalmology, endorsed by the Qualification and Education Committee (QEC);
- the Committee for Visual Safety and Prevention of Blindness was anxious to establish a National Register of the Blind, controlled by the RACO, and Ray Whitford developed a pro-forma suitable for computer use which needed to be worked through with the Federal authorities before it could become a reality;
- Australia-wide progress was made to detect diabetes and to promote a better understanding of eye complications and treatment of this;

- standards for Drivers' Licenses were introduced before the Committee for Visual Safety and Prevention of Blindness was amalgamated with the Sight Rehabilitation Committee;
- the Therapeutic Committee prepared a submission to the Federal Government's Ralph Committee regarding the reluctance of firms to market small volumes of drugs in Australia, that had been evaluated and approved overseas.

In his Presidential Address Eddie acknowledged the progress made during the first ten years of the College in the establishment of the standards for training and qualification in conjunction with the RACS. He recognised that the success of these endeavours was largely due to the mature guidance of the QEC under the chairmanships of Drs Ken Howsam, Peter Rogers and Frank Billson, and that the long-term *aim* of the College must be to continue to ensure the highest possible standard of eye care for the Australian people. Because the *prime function* of the College was education, he propounded that since students should be adequately prepared for their future needs, medical students should have more exposure to ophthalmology, but that it was essential that the College should efficiently plan for teaching ophthalmology in the intern year. He promulgated that trainees should have reasonably good vision, manual dexterity, a passion for detail, moderate intelligence and the necessary motivation to acquire knowledge of their craft. He also touched upon Manpower and reported that in 1974, in a submission to the National Hospitals and Health Services Commission, the College had assessed that a satisfactory ratio of ophthalmologists to population was 1:24,000, but that Manpower studies needed to take account of distribution and other factors. He also expressed concern about the increasing number of foreign trained doctors possibly limiting opportunities for Australian graduates if training posts were to be curtailed. His final point addressed continuing medical education with the quotation: "May there never develop in us the notion that our education is complete but give us the strength and leisure and zeal continually to enlarge our knowledge".

It is said of Eddie Donaldson that he was patient, knowledgeable and generous in transferring his skills in the training of future generations of ophthalmologists and Retinal Surgeons. His contributions to the development of ophthalmology in Sydney confirmed his place among the giants of ophthalmology in Australia and he was appointed Officer of the Order of Australia in 1985. In 1997 he was further honoured with the award of the prestigious College Gold Medal, the highest honour the College can bestow on a Fellow. He was a quiet achiever and a modest man who played down his well-deserved acknowledgements, and was a greatly loved family man.