

Frank Sullivan AO, President of the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists, 1988 - 1989

Frank Sullivan was born on 14 February 1931 at Brisbane. He married Colleen in 1956 and they have a family of 7 girls and one boy, Timothy, who is now a Professor of Ophthalmology at Brisbane. Frank gained his MB BS at Queensland University in 1954; Diploma of Ophthalmology (DO) in London in 1959; Member of the Australian College of Ophthalmologists (MACO) in 1969; and FRACS and FRACO in 1978. He was Chair of the Queensland Branch of the College from 1970 to 1971, and on the Queensland QEC from 1980 to 1986. Frank was VMO at Princess Alexandra Hospital from 1960 to 1980; and Repat General Hospital and Royal Brisbane Hospital from 1980. Frank taught Nurses and Medical Students; held the rank of Captain in the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps; and belonged to the Brisbane and Royal Queensland Golf Clubs, United Service Club, and Queensland Club.

Frank Sullivan served the College on Council from 1970 to 1972; the QEC from 1976 to 1986, holding the position of Censor-in-Chief from 1980 to 1985. He was on the Part II Court of Examiners for 14 years, from 1973 to 1987. In 1985 he took over the role as Chairman of the Part II Court following the retirement of Dr Max Moore and maintained the very high standards established by his predecessor. In 1987 he was succeeded in this by Dr Frank Martin.

During his term as President a Building Committee was set up by Council to examine possible methods of financing renovations to 27 Commonwealth Street, generously gifted to the College by the Ophthalmic Association Limited (NSW Medical Eye Service), which allowed for a permanent home for the College. The issue of the raids by Federal Police and Health Insurance Commission Officers in Queensland was further pursued through the Federal Ombudsman's office but nothing further could be done. A comprehensive paper detailing the separate roles of Ophthalmologists, Optometrists and Optical Dispensers in the delivery of Eye Care Services was submitted to the Federal Department of Community Services and Health in response to their discussion paper on the Participating Optometrists Scheme, and the recommendation was that made that the need for this be reviewed considering the narrow scope of its services, its high cost per benefit ratio, the conflict of interest, and the decision by the British Government to dismantle a similar scheme. The activity of Optometrists in the Visual Screening of School children remained an issue. With the completion of the final manuscript of the College history, Max Moore was invited to write the forward and arrangements for publication, with the title of "New Lamps for Old", were undertaken. Frank led a delegation to London for the inauguration of the College of Ophthalmologists and presented a gift of a Presidential Chair to the new College. Other initiatives were: a new gown for the College was adopted; a survey on Continuing Education to allow the College to tailor the program to the needs of Fellows was funded; a sub-committee was set up to review the structure of Council and the method of election of President. Codes of Ethical Behaviour with the view to setting up a formal body to deal with complaints continued to be considered; an education program which included refraction and training in diabetic screening for General Practitioners was approved; the Glaucoma Club was approved; the College mounted a campaign against Medical Indemnity Insurance to oppose the inclusion of ophthalmology in the highest risk category in accordance with the categorisation of ophthalmology in Canada and the United States. In the training field, a requirement for research during training was introduced: this could be a period of full-time research, presentation of a paper at a meeting, publication in a journal, or writing a dissertation. In the aims of promoting both the College and ophthalmology, it was agreed to provide medical journalists with copies of the Journal, highlighting specific articles which could be of interest to the general public, as well as Scientific Congress Press Releases to highlight developments and details of prominent overseas speakers.

In his Presidential Address in 1989 Frank spoke about the theme of the Congress which was “The Eye in Systemic Medicine”. He reminded the audience that despite the diversification of colleges and divisions within specialties, the shared common bond was that of medicine and the aim was to benefit the whole patient. Therefore, specialties should not be practised in isolation without regard to what others can offer for the well-being of the patient. He was of the opinion that although Australian Ophthalmology was not so isolated, close relationships with other branches of medicine should be developed and continued in private and hospital practice and within medical societies. Involvement also in community affairs and projects would assist in extending and enhancing the image of Ophthalmology. This high profile image should extend to the political level, and ophthalmologists should present a unified voice in the community and to government. His aspirations were that the Congress would enable the delegates to share professional and political problems which would ultimately work to the advantage of their patients.

In 2000 Frank took on the role of Chair of the AMA Ethics Committee. For his long service to the College, in 2010 he was awarded the College Medal, the highest honour given by the College, and in 2011 he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia.

His interests outside ophthalmology and his family are reading, music, swimming, gardening and bush walking.