

James Stewart Rogers, President of the Australian College of Ophthalmologists, 1977 - 1978

James Rogers was born on 4 July 1921 at Hobart and died in Tasmania on 15 September 1997 aged 76 years. He was married and was the father of four children. He qualified with MB BS, DO, FRACO and FRACS, and was Chairman of the Tasmanian Qualification and Education Committee (QEC) in 1973. He was also Chair of the Federal Committee for Undergraduate Education which was responsible for the publication of "Notes on Ophthalmology for Students". He achieved much, not only in ophthalmology, but in military affairs, education, astronomy, science, and sport.

James was a member of the Sydney University Regiment and in WWII he served in New Guinea with the highly secret radar section which played such an important part in the success of operations against the enemy. After the war he remained in the RAAF Reserves until his retirement with the rank of Squadron Leader.

It was while he was in New Guinea that Dr Rogers saw how widespread trachoma and other eye diseases were and in later years he undertook a tremendous amount of voluntary work to do what he could to help. He set up rough clinics along the Fly River and as his fame spread patients began arriving with all manner of tropical diseases that Rogers found himself ill-equipped to deal with so on his return to Australia he undertook a course in Tropical Medicine. When the political changes in New Guinea prevented his return he applied his skills in the South-West Pacific until wide-spread eye disease among the indigenous people of out-back Australia prompted him to concentrate his efforts there.

During his term as President, Her Majesty the Queen, in 1977 had granted the College the right to use the prefix "Royal", and in March 1978 the name of the College was appropriately altered to the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists (RACO); every existing Ordinary Member of the College became a Fellow (FRACO); a five-week tour of US Ophthalmic Institutions was undertaken; a microsurgery course was introduced at Sydney Hospital and a one-day Vitreous surgery course was held. The Visual Safety Committee looked at Road Safety; the binding of books was organised by the Libraries; College membership of Orthoptist Associates was introduced; 75,000 people had been screened with the National Trachoma and Eye Health Program (NT&EHP) and the need for ongoing eye care programs in rural Australia was recommended to the government of the day.

In 1978 James Rogers presided over the Annual Scientific Congress which was held offshore for the first time, in Singapore, where he met Lee Kwan Yew. In his Presidential Address he spoke about the importance of the special senses of sight and speech.

When the University of Tasmania decided to establish courses for mature students Rogers offered to help set them up and lectured in medical subjects amongst others, if the necessity arose. Sometimes he spent many hours re-educating himself to enable him to pass the current knowledge on to others. This work, like most of his other endeavours, was entirely voluntary.

He studied Astronomy and set up his own well-equipped observatory and became President of the Astronomical Society. He was also a member of the Council of the Royal Society of Tasmania and its senior vice-president for two years. James played Billiards and Tennis very well and became Australian Tennis Champion at one time. It was said of him that he was a modest and humble man, allowing deeds rather than words to speak for him.