

## **Kenneth George Howsam, first Chairman of the Qualification and Education Committee (QEC) of the Australian College of Ophthalmologists, 1969 - 1972**

Kenneth George Howsam became a junior resident medical officer (RMO) to the Royal Melbourne Hospital, which included three months as an eye and ear, nose and throat resident when he graduated MB BS from the University of Melbourne during World War II in 1943. He sought enlistment in the RAAF but was deferred for six months to serve as resident at the Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital. He served in the RAAF as a general duties medical officer from October 1944 to March 1947 during which time he met George Thomson, a first-class medical administrator and surgeon who had a marked influence on him. On discharge from that RAAF he was appointed as Resident Medical Superintendent at the Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital.

“K.G.” as he was known, was one of the early pioneers of ophthalmology in Australia. Having passed his examinations for the Diploma of Ophthalmology (DO) of the University of Melbourne he was subsequently appointed as Medical Director of that institution. In 1957 he was admitted via examination as a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (FRACS), and on the foundation of the Royal Australian College of Medical Administrators he became a Fellow (FRACMA). Through his liaison with Ronald Lowe and Peter Howsam at the Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, a cornerstone in the building of Australian ophthalmology was laid. Ken Howsam was sent overseas by the Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital on three occasions, 1958, 1966 and 1972, to seek new knowledge which was to raise ophthalmology standards to an international level. He visited a large number of centres to investigate hospital design, administration and the relationship between universities and the State with respect to hospitals; and studied the training of Resident Medical Officers and rotations between hospitals.

He was elected to the Council of the Ophthalmological Society of Australia in 1958 when it was still a branch of the College of Surgeons, and he actively supported involvement in the Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology holding its 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress in Melbourne in 1964. He gave strong support to the formation of the Australian College of Ophthalmology and with Geoff Harley was responsible for compiling the Memorandum and Articles of Association, to ensure the proper academic and political foundation for its formation.

With the formation of the Australian College of Ophthalmologists (ACO) in 1969, the hotchpotch of available qualifications at the time was brought under control and Ken Howsam accepted the role as first Chairman of the Qualification and Education Committee (QEC) to institute a uniform Australia-wide training program with appropriate examinations to set the hallmark of Australian ophthalmologists. He and his team tackled the compilation of a syllabus and conditions for training, and negotiations were commenced with postgraduate medical education bodies in the States regarding courses of training for examinations for entry to the College. Regulations were drawn up and the establishment of teachers and examiners to assess candidates' qualification for admission were inaugurated. In 1971 it was agreed that entry to the College would be by examination as from 30 June that year. The qualifications issuing from the College's agreement with the Australasian College of Surgeons' came to be accepted by the Australian Commonwealth and State Governments as accreditation for ophthalmologists and in due course the university diplomas of ophthalmology were discontinued. In 1972 Dr Howsam stepped down as Chair of the QEC and travelled overseas on his third trip on behalf of the Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital and to focus on the development of that Hospital. He was subsequently elected to the role of Vice-President of the College, then President, and Immediate Past President, over a span of three years from 1980 to 1983.

After his term as President, “K.G.” took on the challenging and time-consuming role of Inspector of Training Posts and designed the optimal structure and function of all the Australian Training Posts, which served as their model for many years. The inspection and accreditation process intends to ensure that the training posts are of the required standard and at the required level.

Apart from family life with wife and three children, Ken Howsam's major interest in life was organizing a specialist teaching hospital although he was a member of the Lawn Tennis Association of Australia at Kooyong and played tennis at a social level. He liked using tradesmen's tools and became competent at the repair and maintenance of his home and beach house at Inverloch on the Victorian south coast, to where he retired. Travel was another of his past-times, with the added interest of photography. He travelled with Ron Lowe's groups to Java and Bali, Japan and China, and in 1979 travelled overland from Nepal to England. Ken's wife Betty gave him support in all his duties and was also a devoted servant to the Hospital as a long-serving member of the Executive Council of Auxiliaries with involvement in the Hospital's kiosk and opportunity shop.