

Three honours to pioneering department that punched above its weight

Compiled by Emeritus Professor Anthony Radford AM and Associate Professor John Litt AM

In the 2019 Queen's Birthday Honours lists, Emeritus Professor Anthony Radford AM and Associate Professor John Litt AM were made Members of the Order of Australia. These awards, for two members of one of the smallest departments in the University, followed a previous award to third member the late Associate Professor Deane Southgate AM and provide an opportunity to explore the department's extraordinary contributions to general practice.

An award to all three members of the foundation unit of Primary Care and Community Medicine in the new Flinders University Medical School-1975-94 is unusual. Embracing both general practice and public health, this unit took staff and students into the community as part of the academic process.

As a team, the department developed a syllabus with the most extensive exposure of medical undergraduates to matters related to urban and rural general practice and community medicine of any medical school in Australasia, and the most extensive involvement of general practitioners in a hospital setting. A virtual flotilla of general practitioners was mobilised as a teaching cadre across the state to be involved in this pioneering teaching programme.

In 1974 Emeritus Professor Anthony Radford AM was appointed the Foundation Professor of the unit of Primary Care and Community Medicine at the new school of medicine at Flinders University in Adelaide, the first unit of its kind to be established in Australia.

The position was funded from a grant made by the Whitlam Government to enable every medical school to address the perceived deficiencies in undergraduate education in matters related to General Practice and Public Health. An Adelaide graduate, Professor Radford came to Flinders with 15 years of experience in primary health care, general practice and medical education in Papua New Guinea and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.

In Papua New Guinea, Professor Radford participated and taught in the development of its first medical school. Together with teaching a range of health professionals including doctors, nurses, and hospital assistants, particularly in the health needs of rural and remote setting, he practised as the rural medical officer for a population of up to 50,000 people.

As a student at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in 1965 he was awarded their gold medal for tropical medicine. He later gained a Master of Science degree in epidemiology at Harvard University. He returned to Liverpool in 1973 to design and conduct the first multi-disciplinary Master in Public Health course in Europe. Even as an undergraduate, his dream was to raise general practice and community medicine as an academic discipline.

The late Associate Professor Deane Southgate was passionate about general practice and the important role it played in communities. Through his work as a GP, he saw the need for community-based preventive medicine and was instrumental in the establishment of the Community Health Centre at Clovelly Park of which he was its first Director in 1974. Through this involvement, the South Australian Community Health Centres Association was established and its first President, he was an inaugural board member of the Noarlunga Health Service. Apart from his role as the medical officer for Port Stanvac refinery he led the Community Health Centre in providing health services to the numerous small industries in the area.

Dr Southgate was heavily involved in activities related to community involvement in health programmes, especially the Service to Youth Council of South Australia of which he was chairman for a decade. The Council focused on 'at risk' youth, providing community training and employment services. The Southgate Institute of Health, Society and Equity was named for him.

A general practitioner with a special interest in Occupational Health, he was appointed half-time to the department and Dr Ross Harris (later Professor at Wollongong and Sydney), a clinical psychologist with Aboriginal health experience, also joined.

Some years later Associate Professor John Litt AM followed.

Six general practitioners with varying backgrounds divided an additional half time post as tutors. Each had at least one 'special interest'. They included Owen Bowering (senior general practitioner, sports medicine), Peggy Dubberley (counselling), Andris Darzins OAM (migrant health, paediatrics and care of the elderly), Bruce Alcorn (rural general practice), Peter Mudge AM (rural practice and epidemiology of infectious diseases, later Professor of General Practice in Tasmania and Queensland), and Bruce Martin (care of the elderly). Jill Benson AM and Rob Wight OAM, both GPs, were external lecturers.

Most of these tutors held a sessional appointment to the accident and emergency unit and later attachments to clinical hospital departments, such as paediatrics, medicine and O&G. Dr Ross Harris, with Andrew Ramsay, formed probably the first hospital-based clinical unit of Primary Care which particularly addressed psychosomatic issues. They co-authored *Health Care Counselling: a Behavioural Approach*. Later Dr Alan Stewart and the Nutrition unit joined the department. Dr Stewart published two books on good nutrition for older adults at home and in institutions. Dr Darzins prepared a manual on residential care of the elderly for the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

The Department established the first Academic Registrarship for General Practice and Community Health. This was a unique opportunity for medical graduates with an interest in general practice or public health, to put 'a foot in the water' in the academic arena. They were mentored by senior academic staff and gained skills in curriculum development and teaching while advancing their research skills and competencies by being involved in a number of departmental projects.

Most appointed to this post later went on to a chair in general practice or epidemiology. They included:

- Neil Graham (Prof of Epidemiology at Johns Hopkins);
- Tom Elmslie (Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Ottawa)
- David Weller (Professor of General Practice, Edinburgh University)
- Maria Crotty (Professor and Director of Rehabilitation at Repatriation Hospital, Adelaide)
- Nigel Stocks (Professor of General Practice, Adelaide University)
- Teng Liaw (Professor of General Practice at UNSW and Director of the South West Sydney Area Health Service)
- John Litt (Associate Professor, Discipline of General Practice, Flinders University and GP teaching discipline coordinator).

The staff were involved with the evolution of academic General Practice and Public Health at national and local levels. Professor Radford was foundation vice-President of the Australian Faculty of Public Health Medicine and on its Board of Education, and was Deputy Chair of Save the Children Australia. Assoc. Professor Southgate was a foundation member of the Australian College of Occupational and Environmental Health. They were both involved in the evolution of Community Health in South Australia and Associate Professor Southgate established the first Community Health Centre in South Australia at Clovelly Park in 1975.

The unit developed public education programmes in various areas such as health in retirement, entered public debate on Aboriginal health, euthanasia and abortion. They sought to facilitate access to services in areas of need such as rural health services, the needs of youth and men's health, and remote southern and western Australian communities serviced by The Tea and Sugar Train.

With Dr Lu Mykyta, Professor Radford developed the platform from which grew the first Department of Geriatrics at Flinders Medical Centre and was involved in the development of the Accident and Emergency unit which was opened in 1976. He was the first chairman of the Southern Palliative Care Committee which under Professor Ian Maddocks AM grew into the International Institute of Palliative Care. He helped to initiate training programmes for volunteers and chaplains.

After the death of Associate Professor Southgate, Drs Andrew Ramsay and Geoff Stranks co-ordinated field work with general practitioners until Associate Professor Litt integrated and advanced a number of unique education subjects introduced as undergraduate options in the medical course. These included Care of the Elderly (a multidisciplinary course); Death, Dying, Loss and Bereavement (also multidisciplinary); Counselling; Nutrition; and Care of the Disadvantaged, including Aboriginal health.

Associate Professor John Litt integrated and advanced the teaching of general practice in the new Flinders University MD program as the GP teaching coordinator in the discipline of general practice. He introduced a range of contemporary and relatively controversial topics including: domestic violence, men's health, preventive care and chronic disease self-management. With Professor Neil Piller, he developed

the first distance education module for possibly the first Master's degree in Primary Health Care in Australia, developed by Dr Ross Harris. In 2014 he was awarded the Dean's medal.

In the late 1980s Professor Radford commenced a postgraduate summer elective for health professionals and students wishing to acquire knowledge and skills to work with communities in under-resourced situations. This became the most popular summer elective offered by the university and was exported to the USA, the UK, Taiwan and Brazil. It was used by Dr Owen Lewis to establish a similar undergraduate programme at the University of Adelaide.

Despite a heavy teaching load, the department established a profile in many areas of research. Its wide range of epidemiology and health services topics included Aboriginal health issues, the needs of aged people, palliative care, health education, rural health, retirement and men's health issues, substance abuse, infectious and chronic diseases, and operations research in areas of primary health care.

Professor Radford worked for many years with national governments, WHO, UNICEF and numerous NGOs in the evaluation of immunization and other Primary Health Care programmes in several countries on four continents. He was visiting professor to several universities and contributed numerous publications, including chapters for several editions of the *Oxford Text Book of Medicine*. He published two books on living and working in PNG and experiences over two decades as a locum rural GP in remote and isolated South Australia.

Associate Professor Litt has contributed to various editions of the RACGP Standards and provided significant input to a range of GP position statements and policy documents. He has been the leading driver of the RACGP green book, now in its 3rd edition, *Putting Prevention into Practice* and evidence-based review of effective implementation strategies. He has been on the editorial board of the monograph for the last five editions. Both documents are regarded as the benchmark for prevention in general practice. He was a significant contributor to the development of a range of RACGP best practice guidelines in a number of areas and is regarded as a national and international authority on influenza and pneumococcal immunization and control.

Associate Professor Litt was a GP member of the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance, Scientific Advisory Board, which is the peak group overseeing National research and surveillance into Vaccine preventable diseases. He has been an active member of the NHMRC GP clinical Research Grants Working Group and NH MRC Guideline Editorial and Advisory Committee.

His professional contributions to the RACGP were acknowledged by the President of the RACGP in 2007 when she said "Dr Litt, has been pivotal to the success of the College in promoting general practice as a valuable enterprise, as a centre for sustained excellence and in supporting the development of resources. The RACGP values his scholarly input. The RACGP values and acknowledges his significant contribution to the professional life of the College".

In 2006 Professor Radford was awarded the Fred Katz Memorial Medal for services to medical education and the Annual Anthony Radford Oration was established in 2014 in recognition of his work.

In 2016, Associate Professor John Litt was awarded the RACGP Rose Hunt medal, the highest award given by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners for his outstanding contribution. In the same year, the Lung Foundation awarded him a Lifetime Achievement award for his contribution to both smoking cessation and lung cancer.

In 1994 when Professor Radford retired, the department with its wide range of teaching and activities was divided. Professor Chris Silagy was appointed Professor of General Practice and Dr Fran Baum was appointed Professor of Public Health. Later both received awards in the Order of Australia.