

Baker, Lorraine (1956 –)

Dr Lorraine Baker MBBS University of Melbourne 1979, Dip.RANZCOG 1982, Grad.Dip. Women's Health 1993 , has been in General Practice for more than forty years and was President of the AMA Victoria 2016-18. She has provided the following account of her career:

"My family migrated to Australia as ten-pound Poms in 1963. I was six years old and the youngest of four girls who had grown up in provincial England. Broadmeadows Migrant Hostel was a shock. Our family of six was accommodated in one half of a Nissan Hut. We had to use communal bath houses which were regularly vandalised by the then "Broady Boys" who were disenchanted by the migrants' arrivals.

We moved to Airport West so my father could walk to work at Essendon Airport. The roads were at that time unmade and there was no sewerage. The dunny cart was a weekly ritual – pulled by a horse.

At primary school I was exceptionally fortunate to have the same inspiring teacher for three consecutive years -Grades 3,4 &5 – who nurtured my love of reading and maths. He gave his "bright" students extra challenges while also assisting the many children from NESB to become literate in English.

My eldest sister became a teacher during this time and was aware of the existence of "private schools". She encouraged me to sit the scholarship exam to Lowther Hall, and I succeeded in gaining a scholarship. There I received an outstanding education and gained entry to the University of Melbourne Medical School. At that time, it had a three-year pre-clinical curriculum and then moved to three years clinical. A group of my friends decided to apply for the "country club" (as it was known then) of the Austin Hospital campus. It had excellent student quarters and some live-in accommodation. Those of us with awkward commutes soon adapted to a system where we could ask for two weeks accommodation at a time.

My determination to be a GP was already established long before graduation. I had witnessed my mother crying when her GP, Maurice Serry, moved from GP into psychiatry. Evidently he had been someone she could talk to as she adapted to the difficult isolation she felt with Dad on night shifts and her children away all day. I was in primary school still, but somehow this sense that doctors could help people, more than just by treating physical conditions, was born. Good relationships matter in health care.

Given I particularly wished to be a GP obstetrician, I applied to Queen Victoria Hospital (then regarded as a "Monash" hospital) for my intern year in the hope that in second year I could do the obstetric rotation and gain a Dip.Obs. In my intern year I worked with the legendary Dame Joyce Daws (first female president of AMAV). When smoking was banned in the hospital during 1980 she threatened to quit - so they made a small room available in the operating theatre where she could smoke! All four interns who rotated through her unit in 1980 were female. She was very pleased and referred to us as "her girls".

A much humbler man was Mr Wally Watson - ENT surgeon extraordinaire and a generous teacher - ensuring all his interns understood how to do a truly gold standard ENT examination and witness even the most challenging of life-threatening surgeries. He allowed me to observe a delicate operation in a 3-month-old infant with a rapidly growing haemangioma below the vocal cord - causing respiratory obstruction which would have inevitably been fatal. He performed the surgery with his colleague Ron Trower. There were a number of equally difficult surgeries Mr Watson allowed me to witness, and I gather he was similarly generous to each intern who worked through his unit. Sadly, he died prematurely and tragically while swimming with his son – a cardiac event, I believe. There were, among the death notices, tributes from the parents whose children's lives had been saved by him.

Although working long hours, most of the RMOs – junior and senior – got along very well together and enjoyed the ambience of the original building. For me, that second year felt the greatest privilege.

I was at QVMC when the first Australian IVF baby was delivered, and it was a major event with impacts right through the hospital. There was a frenzy of media attention.

RMO year.

Although witness to the IVF extravaganza from a distance, I had the experience of a really high-level obstetric service - with opportunities to witness and (even contribute to) the care of some significant obstetric emergencies. At the same time the NICU was breaking new ground in “salvaging” very preterm infants, and it was awe-inspiring to witness Professor Michael Adamson “reading” those tiny babies during my paediatrics term. He taught me so much. I was attached also to Professor Arthur Clarke's unit. I was unaware at the time that he was overseeing an Australiawide collaboration in breakthrough treatments for acute lymphatic leukaemia which ultimately transformed the prognosis for children with that diagnosis.

QVMC had a resident's lounge. This encouraged camaraderie and interaction with peers (it was a favourite location for commencement of ward rounds with consultants, and there were relatively frequent RMO parties or dinners.) In 1981 a lively group who had done Melbourne Medical Student revues, including me, had the idea of trying to get a Hospital revue off the ground. The idea was embraced across the board - theatre technicians, midwives, paediatric nurses, RMOs and even some consultants entered into the spirit of the idea and a very successful revue took place. Another was produced in 1982 - and I was delighted to be invited back to reprise my Dame Joyce Daws impersonation. It was such fun.

1982 – GP Phillip Island

I had been invited, while completing my RMO year, to join a solo GP on Phillip Island for 1982 where I had done an elective in final year medicine. However, by Easter 1982 I had unexpectedly fallen in love with a “city boy” and returned to Melbourne -working as a school medical officer while my fiancé/husband Simon Corrigan and I considered our career options.

1983 – established Belmore Road Medical Centre

My father-in-law, a retired businessman, encouraged us to “back ourselves” and start a practice of our own. While Simon continued to earn a living as a Casualty Supervisor (this was

before the founding of the College for Emergency Medicine, and Emergency Medicine Fellowships) we scanned for suitable rooms and found some in the eastern suburbs. I “squatted” there in September 1983 (age 26) and Simon joined me six months later. He continued to work an evening shift in Casualty (as it was called then) at Box Hill Hospital so we had some source of regular income.

I have always been interested in public health issues and was drawn into continuing AMA membership beyond my time as an RMO. Once my children were older, I was able to engage with AMAV Council and then the Board.

My Presidency was complicated by the simultaneous arrival of several pieces of contentious legislation which had impact on all levels of the profession. Participation on the various advisory groups as well as being the mouthpiece for AMAV policy and members issues, was relentless. However – to balance this I worked with some outstanding people and was exposed to the political system in action. This is one of the privileges of the President’s role and my life has been richer for it.”

Dr Baker’s contribution has been considerably greater than mentioned in her account. She was the founding member of the Belmore Road Medical Centre in 1983 and became the founding Chairman of the Inner East Melbourne Division of General Practice in 1993. From 1990 until 2009 she was a member of the University of Melbourne Medical Society Committee. From 1994 she was a member of the Board of Directors, Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar School, Essendon, and from 1996 to 2004 she was Chairman of the Board.

In 2009 she became a member of the Victorian Maternity Record (VMR) Steering Committee. In 2010 she became a member of the Committee for “Partners in Clinical Education” at Melbourne East GP Network for the next three years. From 2011-2013 she was a member of the Whole of Government Victorian Alcohol and Drug Strategy Expert Advisory Group, and in 2012 on the S8 Opioid Forum. In 2013 she joined the Supporting Smoking Cessation in Public Hospitals Advisory Group and the Committee “Strength of Mind” - celebrating 125 years of Women in Medicine (University of Melbourne). In 2010, also, she joined the Board of Directors of the Australian Medical Association (Victoria), continuing until the end of her Chairmanship of the Board and AMAV Presidency (2016-2018).

In addition to her Presidency, she also became Chair of the Victorian Doctors Health Program 2016–2018 and a member of numerous Advisory Groups. These included:

- Victorian Clinical Council (2016-2021),
- Pharmacist Chronic Disease Management Pilot Advisory Group (2016-2018),
- Premier's Ice Action Taskforce - Specialist Workforce Advisory Group (2016-2018),
- Advisory Group on Implementation of the Advanced Care Directive Planning Strategy from 2014-2018 (2016-2018),
- Real Time Prescription Monitoring Advisory Group (Safescript) (2016-2018),
- Industry Taskforce on Family Violence (2016-2018),
- Victorian Renewal Advisory Committee for the Cervical Screening Program (2015-2016),
- Violence in Healthcare Reference Group (2016-2018),
- Consensus Working Party - Integrated Emergency Care for Older Persons (2016),

- System Design, Service & Infrastructure Plan for Surgery and Endoscopy (The Plan) (2016), (2016-2017),
- Medical Treatment and Decision-Making Act Advisory Group (2017),
- Integrated Assessment Tool for Chronic Disease Management (2017).

