

Hurley, Sir Thomas Ernest Victor (1888-1958)

Sir Thomas Ernest Victor Hurley (1888-1958), surgeon and medical administrator, and Leslie Everton (1893-1967), physician, were born on 3 January 1888 at Ceres, Victoria, and 28 January 1893 at Everton, eldest and fourth sons of Thomas Hurley, state schoolteacher, and his wife Mary Elizabeth, née Scholes, both Victorian born. Educated at various primary schools determined by their father's postings, they both won scholarships to Wesley College, and to Queen's College, University of Melbourne.

At Wesley, Victor gained exhibitions in completing his Leaving certificate and played for the first XI. (Sir) William Upjohn, a schoolmate, later wrote that Hurley already possessed the qualities that were to make him an outstanding leader in his field: he was 'alert, merry, fond of fun, good at sport, very good at studies, frank and unafraid to express his opinions, companionable and . . . friendly'. In 1905 he entered the university (M.B., 1909; B.S., 1910; M.D., 1912; M.S., 1913) where he was awarded exhibitions in pathology, and in medicine and obstetrics.

On graduating, Hurley was appointed resident medical officer (1910) at the (Royal) Melbourne Hospital. It was the beginning of an association with that institution that was to span almost fifty years. In 1911 he became registrar. Next year, as medical superintendent, he supervised the almost total rebuilding of the hospital on its Lonsdale Street site. He was appointed an honorary surgeon to outpatients in 1914. In that year he commenced private practice in Collins Street.

On 20 August 1914 Hurley was appointed captain, Australian Army Medical Corps, Australian Imperial Force, and sailed for Egypt in October. He served at Gallipoli from April to September 1915 with the 2nd Field Ambulance. Promoted temporary lieutenant colonel in March 1916 (substantive 1917), he performed staff duties at A.I.F. Headquarters, London, in 1916-17; he was appointed C.M.G. (1917) and mentioned in dispatches for his 'tact, ability and strenuous work'. In 1917-18 he was on the Western Front, principally with the 2nd Australian General Hospital. His A.I.F. appointment terminated in Melbourne on 11 February 1920.

Before leaving England, Hurley had become a fellow (1918) of the Royal College of Surgeons, England. On 10 June 1919 at St James's parish church, Westminster, he married Elsie May, daughter of G. H. Crowther; she had come to London as a member of a Voluntary Aid Detachment during the war. Back in Melbourne, they bought a house at South Yarra, from which they moved in 1926 to a larger one at Toorak to accommodate their growing family. Hurley had resumed practice in Collins Street and at the (Royal) Melbourne Hospital out-patients' department.

His ability soon won him additional responsibilities, as lecturer and examiner in surgery at the university, founding secretary (1920-23) of the Surgical Association of Melbourne and assistant to (Sir) George Syme, surgeon to the Victoria Police. On Syme's retirement in 1928, he took over that position and held it until 1956. In 1921 he had been elected to the council of the Victorian branch of the British Medical Association (president 1930), on which he served for the rest of his life, apart from a short interval during World War II. He was a member (1923-48) of the Charities Board of Victoria and a foundation member (1927) of the (Royal) Australasian College of Surgeons. In 1927 he was made

honorary surgeon to in-patients at the (Royal) Melbourne Hospital. He was dean of its clinical school in 1929-36.

Hurley followed Basil Kilvington as Stewart lecturer in surgery (1936-46) at the university. As a lecturer, wrote one of his sons who was a medical student, he was 'clear and methodical' rather than inspiring. His lectures were well organized, sound and practical, but they lacked the 'oratorical skill and showmanship' of Sir Alan Newton, the 'mordant wit' of Upjohn and the 'verve' of Victor's brother Leslie. One of his colleagues noted that, as a surgeon, Hurley was 'orthodox and safe', but added that, if the essence of style were to achieve maximum result with minimum effort, he had style. 'One elegant stroke would sever the skin . . . A few confident blows with the blades, and the most brutish of gall-bladders was ripe for the plucking'. Hurley chaired (1936-46) the board of examiners in surgery. Chairman, as well, of the Red Cross Society of Australia in 1939-40, he resigned to take the post of director (director-general from January 1943) of medical services, Royal Australian Air Force.

The infant R.A.A.F. medical service had been controlled by the director-general of army medical services. Hurley developed an autonomous organization capable of meeting wartime needs. One of his earliest actions was to recommend the formation of the R.A.A.F. Nursing Service. He recruited large numbers of medical officers: there were more than five hundred by 1944, reinforced by part-time consultants throughout Australia. The first R.A.A.F. hospitals were established, initially at Laverton and Ascot Vale, and at Richmond, New South Wales.

In late 1940 Hurley instigated and thereafter chaired the Flying Personnel Research Committee to study problems in aviation medicine. Having sent R.A.A.F. officers to Britain to learn Royal Air Force methods, he set up rehabilitation centres which helped air-crew to overcome major surgical, orthopaedic and neuro-psychiatric disabilities, and to return to duty. His medical air-evacuation transport units shifted thousands of battle casualties in the South-West Pacific Area. Appointed C.B. in 1945, he was demobilized on 6 December.

After the war Hurley returned to practice and was a consulting surgeon (from 1947) at the R.M.H. He took on additional professional positions: Victorian representative on the Federal council of the B.M.A. in Australia, vice-president (president from 1950) of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Research, president (1947) of the Medical Legal Society of Victoria, vice-president (1947-51) of the R.A.C.S. and president (1947-57) of the R.M.H. In 1948 he chaired the surgery section of the sixth Australasian Medical Congress, held in Perth.

As president of the B.M.A. in 1949-51, Hurley was a conciliatory negotiator between the association and the Chifley government over the Pharmaceutical Benefits Act (1947) which was a modest first step towards a national health service. A proponent of a national insurance scheme, Hurley was sympathetic to the proposals of the minister for health, N. E. McKenna, but he faithfully represented the views of the B.M.A. He was appointed K.B.E. in 1950. In 1951-53 he was president of the R.A.C.S. On his retirement as president of the R.M.H., the hospital established the Victor Hurley Research Fund.

Much loved within the medical profession, Hurley had 'a broad, open, friendly face which inspired trust and confidence'. His natural charm, equable, quiet cheerfulness, humanity, tolerance and easy sociability made him approachable to colleagues and patients alike. Blessed with the ability to relax and enjoy the company of his fellows, he relished humorous stories and ridiculous situations. He was

president of the Naval and Military Club, a member of the Melbourne Club, and he played a 'crisp' game at the Royal Melbourne Golf Club. In later life his home was at Kew, and he treasured holidays with his family at their seaside cottage at Point Lonsdale.

Survived by his wife, two daughters and four sons, Sir Victor died of complications of emphysema on 17 July 1958 at Royal Melbourne Hospital; he was accorded a funeral with R.A.A.F. honours and was cremated. His estate was sworn for probate at £43,550. The R.M.H. holds his portrait by Murray Griffin.

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