

Webster, Ross Wharton (1924- 2003)

Ross Wharton Webster, MBBS, FRACP FRACGP FAFPHM, FAMA, son of Reginald Webster, the first Victorian public hospital pathologist, was born on 5 January 1924 in Melbourne. He studied medicine at the University of Melbourne, graduating MBBS in 1947. He was a Resident Medical Officer at the Royal Melbourne Hospital in 1947 and 1948 and in the following year served with the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan. He returned to the Royal Melbourne Hospital in 1950 and went into general practice in Horsham in 1953.

From his arrival in Horsham until 1972 he was an honorary medical officer to the Wimmera Base Hospital and for most of those years was a member of the hospital Committee of Management. He took an active part in municipal affairs, serving on the City of Horsham Council for six years and was Mayor of the City in 1970 and 1971.

Meanwhile Ross was admitted to membership of the R.A.C.G.P. in 1968 and to Fellowship of the College in 1971. In 1977 he became a member of the R.A.C.P. and was elected to Fellowship the following year.

After his wife Marjory's death in 1972, and with three children to care for, Ross opted for regular hours of work at the Cancer Institute in Melbourne. From 1972 to 1975 he was Deputy Director of the Cancer Institute in Melbourne and was then appointed as the first Professor of Community Health at the University of Melbourne. In the same year he was elected as Vice-Chairman of the Victorian Medical Postgraduate Foundation and since 1976 has been a member of the Preventive Medicine in Community and General Health Standing Committee of the N.H. and M.R.C. In 1985, he married Jill, who was at the time Director of Nursing Education at the Cancer Institute.

He joined the AMA upon graduation in 1949 and was an active and dedicated member, being a Councillor of the Victorian Branch for 33 years, firstly for the North Western Country Subdivision, then in 1974 as the representative of the Senior Salaried Staffs Subdivision and since then as a representative of the general body of members. He was Chairman for 14 years. He was elected President in 1977. He is the only recipient of AMA Victoria's Medal of Merit. He chaired the AMA Federal Council and Assembly for 6 years and was elected a Fellow of the AMA in 1979.

Ross was a tireless worker for the University community. He chaired the University's Board of Social Studies, the Academic Committee and the Social Biology Resources Centre. He also chaired accreditation committees for nursing courses and the Victorian Health Advisory Council. He served on the Health Services Review Council and on the Federal Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Ross was Chairman of the Australian Medical Agency, the Victorian Medical Insurance Agency, the AMA Friendly Society, AMA Financial Services and the AMA Health Fund. From 1983 to 1988, he was Chairman of the Australasian Medical Publishing Company, publisher of the Medical Journal of Australia.

Although he retired from the University in 1989, Ross did not stop working. In 1990, he became a part-time Director of Medical Services at Werribee and Broken Hill hospitals. He was also Foundation

Chairman of the Medical Indemnity Protection Society (1988-1998), and continued to manage legal claims until his retirement in 2002.

Ross was a man of great integrity. He was intolerant of questionable corporate behaviour and conflicts of interest, and had no time for specious arguments "justifying" such behaviour. He was friend, mentor and, above all, exemplar to many doctors. He died on 26 November 2003, of multiple myeloma. The profession and the community at large celebrate his lifetime of achievement and service.

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Sources: Branch News 1977; Personal CV; MJA, 5/4/2004, p.351.

Draft compiled by Allan Mawdsley

