

## Wood, Arthur Jeffreys (1861 – 1937)

Jeffreys Wood was born on 9 April 1861, at Christchurch Parsonage, Wood Street, Lower Hawthorn, Melbourne. He was educated under Professor Irving at Hawthorn Grammar School and passed the matriculation examination in 1877. After leaving school, he visited England and studied there. We know that he took "occasional subjects" for six months in 1880 at King's College, London; and we recall that Joseph Lister was then professor in clinical surgery there. Jeff Wood commenced the medical course at the University of Melbourne in 1881, and after his graduation in 1885 he became a resident medical officer at the Melbourne Hospital. He embarked on his life work when, in 1887, he accepted appointment as the house surgeon at the Children's Hospital and obtained his doctorate by examination whilst in that post.

In 1887, the hospital was merely 17 years old and was still small; it had only 45 beds. However, William Snowball, the redoubtable senior medical officer, was already very well known as a competent children's specialist. Jeff Wood was fortunate to secure him as a mentor at that stage in his career. Next year, a second resident medical officer was appointed and Jeff Wood's long association at the hospital with Frank Hobill Cole commenced. A year later, Richard Rawdon Stawell joined the resident staff; he, too, had been educated at Hawthorn Grammar School. They were trained by Snowball, and they learned in a hard school, for "Snowy" was an autocrat.

In 1890 Jeff Wood went abroad again, and he was accompanied by "Dicky" Stawell. They did post-graduate work at University College Hospital, at the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases, Queen's Square, and at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London. It is probable that they visited the Edinburgh medical school and that they returned via America.

They were both made members of the honorary medical staff at the Children's Hospital in 1891, and thus became juniors to the famous Snowball, the learned Peter Bennie and Charles Ryan, the dashing doughty surgeon. In 1891 Robert Hamilton Russell settled in Melbourne fresh from Kings College Hospital, where he had been trained by Lister. The three brilliant young men joined forces; they lived and practised privately at 19 Collins Street. In 1892 Hamilton Russell was also appointed to the honorary staff at the Children's Hospital. Russell became a great surgeon and Stawell a famous physician, and they were both renowned as teachers. The die was cast for Jeff Wood, he was well equipped as a paediatrician and, with steadfastness and confidence. he followed that vocation to the end of his days.

Jeff Wood was a pathfinder. Long before the introduction of antitoxic serum, membranous croup was a cruel killer of little children. Whilst abroad, he had learned O'Dwyer's method of intubation, and he obtained the instruments. In 1891, at the hospital, he had the satisfaction of saving five of the first nine victims of laryngeal diphtheria thus treated. He was the first to demonstrate locally that cretinism could be mitigated by oral thyroid therapy, and he continued to take a great interest in cretinism. He also thought deeply in those early years about the mysterious antiscorbutic principle and was thrilled, later, when the water-soluble vitamin was incriminated and isolated. He introduced the Lorenz method of management of congenital dislocation of the hip joint and was one of the first to deprecate violent manipulation and to preach the wisdom of gentleness combined with skill. In later years, he displayed

great interest in Legg's disease, which became better known as Perthes's disease, and he generously recognized that the relatively small number of gratifying results he had had with tuberculous disease of the hip joint could be ascribed to misdiagnosis, and he accepted them as examples of Perthes's disease. He became a great admirer of Harry Platt, of Manchester. Similarly, when pink disease became defined as an entity by Swift, of Adelaide, Jeff Wood and Hobill Cole overhauled their records and published an account of some 86 cases thus diagnosed retrospectively. Right to the end, Jeff was fascinated with pink disease, and it was the subject of his last publication, prepared in collaboration with his son.

Perhaps Jeff Wood's most important contribution to paediatrics was his profound study of the value of cow's milk as a substitute for breast milk in infant feeding which, nowadays, seems axiomatic. Like Truby King and many other people, he was very disturbed by the high infantile mortality rate, and was greatly impressed by Pierre Budin's work in Paris. Jeff became very antagonistic to the prevalence of nappy feeding and the misuse of patent concoctions as additives and in artificial feeding. He investigated the state of Melbourne's milk supply, and was horrified at its serious contamination and poor quality. With justice and reason, he blamed bad milk for a great many infantile illnesses and deaths.

By 1894 he was secretary of the Medical Society of Victoria and he kept the job for three years. By 1905 he was President. He had to use all his reserve powers of diplomacy. The Victorian Branch of the British Medical Association had been existing alongside the Medical Society of Victoria since 1879 as a seceding body. Jeff Wood played a prominent part in the highly desired fusion of the two professional organisations, which became effective by 1907. That year was also the year in which the Paediatric Society was formed, and he was a founding member; he became its president in 1908.

Wood retired from active practice in 1921 but maintained a consultancy position at the hospital until his death in 1937. He took a great interest in the nursing school, which was started in the care of a Nightingale trainee from Hobart in 1887 when Jeff Wood was the resident medical officer. The best nurse in each annual group receives the Jeffreys Wood Gold Medal.

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Main source: Paediatric profile by Boyd Graham, MJA 1959, p.144;

