



David Patrick (Paddy) Finnegan, VRD, OAM



**BDS, MRCS (Eng), MRCP (London), FRACGP
RACGP President 1984–6**

Paddy Finnegan was born on 4 January 1916 in Wandsworth, London; the son of Dr John Finnegan MC MD (1882–1955) and Jeannie Thompson (1883–1954). John Finnegan had graduated from Queens College in Belfast (later the Queen's University, Belfast) and had moved to Wandsworth in southwest London in 1908.

Paddy was the middle of three boys who all attended Epsom College near London, and all became medical practitioners. Paddy's older brother was John Dennis Finnegan (1914–70), and his younger brother was Terence Robert Launcelot Finnegan (1922–96).

Education

Epsom College had been established by the embryonic British Medical Association in 1855. Referring to its alumni on its website, the college describes Paddy as follows:

DAVID PATRICK FINNEGAN (born 1916). B.D.S., M.R.C.S. (Eng.), M.R.C.P. (Lond.) [Epsom College 1929-1935. head prefect. Brande Prize] was the son of Dr John Finnegan, M.C., of Sanderstead, Surrey, and brother of Dr John Dennis Finnegan [Epsom College 1928-1932]. He received his medical education at Guy's Hospital, and went into general practice in Adelaide, Australia. He was elected President of the Australian Royal College of General Practitioners. During the Second World War he served as a Surgeon Lieutenant with the R.N.V.R. (1942-1945).

Military service

As stated on the college website, Paddy Finnegan served as a surgeon lieutenant with the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve from 1942 to 1945. He was posted as a ship's surgeon on merchantmen and destroyers, including those involved in the Arctic convoys, but would not talk about those experiences. As the war was ending, he was posted to a military hospital in Ceylon and was eventually demobilised in 1946. Paddy remained attached to the Royal Navy for many years and consequently was awarded a VRD (Decoration for Officers of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve).

Marriage

On 12 May 1945, four days after VE Day, Paddy married Sydney-born Elizabeth Hamilton Youdale (1922–2017) in London; a honeymoon in Scotland followed. They were to have three children.

Migration

Like many other UK doctors, Paddy decided to migrate to Australia because of the increasing bureaucratisation of the National Health Service and 'the cold winters'. No doubt his wife, having been born in Australia, also influenced the decision, but the move was not finalised until after the death of both of Paddy's parents. In June 1957, Paddy flew into Sydney giving his intended address as 185 Payneham Road, St Peters, South Australia, which would become his place of work for the next 30 years.

His wife and their three children followed on the SS *Strathnaver*, arriving in Port Adelaide early that August. The Finnegan family soon moved into a comfortable home in Marden, a suburb of Adelaide, barely a mile from Paddy's surgery.

Medical practice

Paddy gained both his dental and medical qualifications at Guy's Hospital, London, sitting his final examination in February 1942. After service in the Royal Navy, he joined his father in general practice in Sanderstead on the outskirts of London. At one time there were four Dr Finnegan's working in the practice.

Paddy was devoted to his profession, and in 1952 became a foundation member of The Royal College of General Practitioners.

Having decided to move to Australia, Paddy found that the Adelaide practice of John Pedler, David 'Frog' Davies and James Donald 'Don' Sidey (a specialist surgeon, ex Royal Navy) was looking for a partner. Paddy arranged for an 'assistantship with view' and soon became a full partner. He worked as a GP with an interest in anaesthetics, being accredited as such by local private hospitals, as well as by the Royal Adelaide Hospital.

Paddy retired in March 1989. At that time, his practice, known since 1970 as Finnegan and Partners, had six doctors working from two surgeries, a branch having been opened at Klemzig in 1966. In order of seniority, the doctors were Paddy Finnegan, David Oaten, Peter Kreminski, Carole Wiseman, David May and Vivienne Clark.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

Paddy Finnegan became a founding member of the South Australian faculty of what was then the Australian College of General Practitioners in 1958, just eight months after his arrival in Australia. He was instrumental in the creation of a formal training program for general practice in South Australia in 1974 and served as the college's 13th (national) president from September 1984 to October 1986. He was the third South Australian to occupy that position after Cliff Jungfer and David Game. Somehow, he was able to combine the responsibilities of presidency of an expanding college with his other commitments, including a busy practice. He was awarded an Order of Australia in 1992 for 'Service to the community, through the Uniting Church and to the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners'.

Church

A stalwart of the Congregational Church, being the President of the South Australian Congregational Union in the 1960s, Paddy supported his wife when she became moderator of the South Australia Synod of the Uniting Church in 1987. Paddy had been the chairman from 1977 to 1981 of planning teams responsible for unification of churches to form the Uniting Church. Furthermore, Paddy served on many committees, including the Home Mission Department, National Mission Committee and the Parkin Congregational Mission. He was an elder in the local church.

Other interests

The tall, well-built Paddy was a keen and capable rugby player in his youth. His rugby-playing days were curtailed by injury, but he continued to be involved in the game by becoming a referee. He continued this after coming to South Australia. His professional, charitable, church and family life was full, but he found time for gardening, tennis and his regular weekly game of squash, which he continued playing into his 70s against a medical friend (Robin Archibald 'Bob' Burston, 1921–2008).

Death

Paddy had diabetes for many years and died from Alzheimer's in Adelaide on 12 December 1998. He left behind his widow Elizabeth and his three children, who had all become notably successful in their professions.

Elizabeth Hamilton Finnegan OAM (1922–2017)

Elizabeth was a supportive, devoted wife and mother and achieved recognition in her own right for her work within the Congregational Church (later Uniting Church) and other charitable bodies.

She was born in Sydney in 1922 to Roy Harold Youdale (1890–1972, ex Australian Flying Corps) and Sara Adam Watson (1892–1973). The family migrated to England when Elizabeth was six, and she later would become a physiotherapist.

After returning to Australia with her own family in 1957 and settling in Adelaide, Elizabeth became involved in numerous charities. She was state president of the Congregational Union of South Australia (1974–5); moderator of the South Australia Synod from 1987 to 1989 (being the first lay person and the first woman to hold that office); secretary of the Mt Lofty Presbytery (1982–5) and then chairperson (1985–6); foundation board member of Eldercare Inc (former deputy chairman); board member of Alexandra Homes Trust Inc and Uniting Church Retirement Homes Inc; council member of Annesley College (1987–93) and then chairperson (1989–93); president of Travellers Aid from 1984 to 1992 (member since 1962); and information officer and carer support group leader of Alzheimer's Association of South Australia from 1999 until later in life. She was awarded an Order of Australia in 2001 for 'Service to the community, particularly through the aged care and educational agencies of the Uniting Church in Australia'.

After Elizabeth's death, a tribute to her life in *The Advertiser* on 30 September 2017 stated how loved and respected she had been by her three children, five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

– Peter Kreminski

July 2020

The author is indebted to Paddy's children for supplying many of the details of their father's life and the photo of their parents. Elizabeth Finnegan was interviewed some years ago and kindly made available the 1984 photograph of her husband.



Paddy and Elizabeth Finnegan in their garden, circa 1985.

Page 1 image: Paddy Finnegan, pictured in 1984, wearing the regalia of the President of the RACGP.

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