

A portrait of Dr Kevin Patrick Mahoney, an older man with white hair and glasses, smiling. He is wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a patterned tie. The background of the portrait is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting.

# Dr Kevin Patrick Mahoney

MBBS, FRACGP, DObst RCOG, Dip RACOG, FAFOEM

Dr (Kevin) Patrick Mahoney is one of The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners' (RACGP's) quiet achievers.

As one of the first RACGP trainees, Patrick became involved with the Queensland Faculty Board and has since served in a number of roles at faculty and national levels. He has provided unwavering service to the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital for 40 years as staff GP and Occupational Health Director. He has also had a long and ongoing involvement with the University of Queensland through its Alumni Association and the Marks-Hirschfeld Museum of Medical History.

## Early days

Born in Milton, Brisbane, on 13 January 1939, Patrick grew up in Red Hill and later St Lucia. He was one of four children and the eldest son in the family.

Patrick's father, Kevin Mahoney, was an electrician and cable jointer, and as the seventh son of a seventh son was considered to be a very lucky lad. Kevin married Mary Meehan, a seamstress who made all of the children's clothes and, in later years, sewed garters for brides.

Patrick was educated at Marist Brothers College Rosalie, where he was co-class captain in 1954. He was awarded a Commonwealth Scholarship to study medicine at the University of Queensland, graduating with an MBBS in 1965.

## Family

While at university, Patrick was an avid tennis player and used to practice tennis at Dr Charles Marks' home.

The Marks family were close friends with the Hirschfeld family, and the two families would host tennis parties.

It was at one of these tennis parties that he met this 'stunning school girl' named Mary Hirschfeld. However, it was not until Mary was in her first year of medical school in 1958 that they had their first date – going to the movies to see *Around the World in 80 Days*.

Mary and Patrick dated throughout their years in medical school and were married when Patrick graduated in December 1965. Their first child, Deirdre, was born in 1966, twins Stephen and Rosaleen in 1968 and the youngest, Elizabeth, in 1970. Mary is a renowned medical educator and stalwart of the RACGP (refer to biography of Emeritus Professor Dr Mary Mahoney).

## Career

Patrick worked as an intern and resident medical officer (RMO) at the Royal Brisbane Hospital before taking on a paediatric registrar position at the Royal Children's Hospital for two years.

In 1969, the RACGP Queensland Faculty set up a general practice registrar training position within the Royal Brisbane Hospital. Patrick was one of the first batch of general practice registrars in Queensland and completed six-month rotations in obstetrics, anaesthetics, medicine and psychiatry.

This was set up prior to the Family Medicine Programme (FMP) and other trainees in his cohort included Dr Jim Hill, Dr Paul Earner and Dr Ted Dauber.

Patrick completed his Diploma of Obstetrics and Gynaecology with the then Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, which held the examinations in Sydney with visiting examiners from Britain.

In 1971, Patrick joined a general practice in the Brisbane suburb of Stafford to work with Dr Brian Clarke and Dr Terry Darwin. This was a very busy practice and Patrick built up a patient base very quickly. It was a time when GPs did their own after-hours work and Patrick was on call three nights a week and every third weekend. There was at least one call out whenever he was on call – and very often more.

While perusing the newspapers one day, Patrick spotted an advertisement for an occupational health director at the Royal Brisbane Hospital. He was successful in his application and took up the position in October 1972. This was a new position created by the Royal Brisbane Hospital and the first of its kind in a Queensland hospital.

Back in the 1970s, nurses were required to live in nurses' quarters and there was no dedicated staff physician to look after them in a coordinated fashion. The nurses' healthcare was largely done in an ad hoc fashion by the medical superintendent and registrars, who changed over regularly. Patrick recalls that there were no regular medical notes kept of these 'consultations'.

The new position of Occupational Health Director of the Royal Brisbane Hospital was to take over full responsibility for the medical care of nurses, as well as the hospital workers' compensation and superannuation assessments. Patrick had a dedicated staff ward where he could admit nurses for inpatient treatment under his care.

The role eventually evolved and he was the GP available to all the staff working in the hospital network – in addition to the Royal Brisbane Hospital, there was the Royal Children's and Royal Women's hospitals and, later, the Queensland Medical Research Centre and the Herston Medical School.

Patrick fondly recalls this as a 'fantastic job'.

He recounts tales of students invading the clinics as they presented for their pre-nursing examinations, performing vaccinations and giving travel medicine advice, in addition to providing comprehensive medical care to the live-in nurses and on-site staff. The job also included undertaking workers' compensation and superannuation assessment and reviews when he did his own audiometry assessments of staff that had been exposed to loud noises.

Patrick was the first dedicated staff GP and occupational physician in a Queensland hospital. Other hospitals in Brisbane – Princess Alexandra Hospital and Prince Charles Hospital – set up similar positions that for unknown reasons did not last for more than five years.

Dr Manny Rathus, a South African occupational medicine doyen in Queensland, was a mentor to Patrick in his early days on the job. Dr Rathus wrote the book on the history of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine, which Patrick helped to get printed.

Over the 40 years, Patrick saw major changes that altered the dynamics of his role. The nurses' quarters were closed down when nurses were no longer required to live on site. As a consequence, and in part due to Patrick's efficient and effective care, the staff ward was closed down as the number of inpatient admissions dwindled. Patrick continued to admit to the public wards but recalls that the staff were 'most dissatisfied' with this arrangement.

The role took on a more occupational health focus, with Patrick dealing more with workers' compensation cases that involved assessing and certifying staff members for time off and providing assistance with return-to-work plans. Patrick would liaise with the staff member's local GP either through a letter or a phone call.

After a mammoth 40 years, the position at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital was ceased in 2012. At the age of 73, Patrick was invited to work with Dr Abi Varshny, principal of a practice close to the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital in Bowen Hills, with four other doctors. He worked for two days a week at the practice, serviced a nearby nursing home, Villa Maria, and provided cover for the other doctors when they took leave. As the practice was close to the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, many of Patrick's patients from the hospital would walk down the street to continue to see him for their medical care.

On 31 December 2015, at the age of 75, Patrick decided it was time to retire, as he was not getting any younger and, in his own words, wanted to 'get out on a high note'.

## College

Patrick joined the RACGP Queensland Board in 1969 when he commenced general practice training, and continued to serve for over 30 years. He held the position of Honorary Secretary for a number of years (1979–83 and 1990–91), which involved dealing with all incoming correspondence and, as he recalls, 'writing many letters'.

As Secretary, Patrick would review the minutes of the meetings and accompany the Faculty Chair to meetings with the state's Health Minister. Over time, Patrick held all of the posts on the Faculty Board except Treasurer, a role he vehemently avoided. He chaired the Faculty Board in 1991–95.

In 1986, Patrick was elected to be the Faculty Representative to Council, a role he held for four years, and was elected as Chair of Council for three years. This was in the days when the Faculty Chair was responsible for the affairs of the faculty and did not sit on Council. Instead, a member was elected to represent the faculty's interests on National Council. However, Patrick recalls that this proved to be unwieldy and Council representation became the responsibility of the Faculty Chair.

In 1998 he was elected as Honorary Secretary of College Council and held this position for four years.

Vocational registration was introduced in 1989 despite fierce opposition from the Australian Medical Association (AMA). Patrick was charged with engaging with the AMA branches across the state in order to explain the concept and try to gain some level of acceptance.

Despite being a member of the AMA since 1966, these meetings were often very difficult and Patrick recalls a meeting in Redcliffe that was particularly prickly. He also tells a tale of being invited by the AMA onto the Kookaburra Queen for a dinner cruise up the Brisbane River. His wife Mary accompanied him on this occasion and recounts a night of 'being stuck and harangued'.

Another contentious issue that the RACGP Council had to deal with was the split by rural doctors and the formation of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM). As Council Secretary, Patrick was required to attend the different conferences as RACGP representative – a time he simply describes as 'difficult'. Patrick has expressed sincere regret that things turned out the way they did.

A defining time in Australian medical history was the public fearmongering about HIV and hepatitis B. Patrick was approached to undertake a national tour and deliver public lectures on the subject. He was accompanied and supported by Professor John Dwyer, an infectious diseases physician at Prince of Wales Hospital and University of New South Wales.

Given his lived experiences during controversial times in RACGP history, Patrick was well qualified to be the Queensland Faculty Provost (1996–98) and to serve on the National RACGP Archives Committee, joining other senior members such as Dr Frank Fry and Dr Eric Fisher.

Patrick was a strong supporter of his wife Mary, who was actively involved in the RACGP's FMP. Patrick did not contribute in a formal capacity, but did say, 'Mary frequently roped me in to move furniture, wash up glasses and rearrange conference rooms!'

## ANZSOM

Before formal qualifications for occupational physicians came in, occupational medicine was performed by GPs with an interest in occupational and industrial medicine. These included leading occupational medicine enthusiasts like Dr Manny Rathus and Dr Frank Benson.

Together, these like-minded doctors formed the Australian and New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine (ANZSOM) and met once a month over dinner with a speaker presenting on whatever was new or of interest in occupational medicine.

Patrick is grateful that ANZSOM organised an intense three-week course in occupational medicine in Sydney before he commenced his role as Occupational Health Director for the Royal Brisbane Hospital. Patrick has been involved with the ANZSOM as a member of the executive, Honorary Treasurer and later Chair of the Queensland branch.

Over the years, occupational medicine became a defined discipline and a number of ANZSOM members developed the Australian College of Occupational Medicine, which subsequently became the Australian Faculty of Occupational Medicine within the Royal Australian College of Physicians, where it later morphed into the Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. Patrick remains a member and holds a Fellow of the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (FAFOEM).

## University of Queensland

A graduate of the University of Queensland (UQ), Patrick has been an active member of the Alumni Association since his graduation in 1965. He served on the executive committee for over a decade and was involved in the formation of the medical alumni.

Patrick was awarded honorary life membership of Alumni Friends of UQ in 2009. He continues his association as Treasurer of the medical alumni and is proud of the charitable work of the alumni. He cites examples such as purchasing scooters for disabled students, microscopes, library textbooks and supporting the debating team to compete in the US.

Patrick still helps out by selling books at the UQ alumni fundraising book fair held every second year. He is also the Treasurer for the UQ Marks–Hirschfeld Museum of Medical History.

## Other interests

Patrick was a member of the fathers' group of the Parents and Friends Committee at Brisbane Girls Grammar School for seven years, and served as its President in 1980. He once had a canoe named in his honour, though says that he is not sure if it is still seaworthy today.

During his time at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Patrick joined the Arts Venture 2000 Committee in 1998 and later became its Chair in 2006–12. He is very pleased with the work of this committee in 'filling the walls of the hospital with art'. The initiative was well received, as artists would hang their paintings in the hospital and donate a certain percentage of the sales.

## Awards

- 1965 – UQ Half Blue Award for rowing. The Blues Awards have a long tradition at UQ sport and are awarded to sportsmen and sportswomen in recognition of their outstanding achievements and for enhancing the reputation of university sport
- 2002 – RACGP College Medal. In recognition of his many years of service on RACGP Council
- 2009 – Honorary Life Member, Alumni Friends of UQ
- 2011 – RACGP Queensland Faculty Chair Award. In recognition of his 30 years of service to the Faculty Board
- 2012 – Department Winner, Executive Director Award Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital
- 2012 – Lifetime Achievement Award, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. This award is only given to one member of staff each year and was awarded to Patrick for his contributions of over 40 years of service

– Dr Eleanor Chew OAM, April 2019

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### Disclaimer

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