

Emeritus Professor Dr Mary Deirdre Mahoney AO



MBBS, GDipClinEd, Hon MD, FRACGP, MRACMA, FAIM, FAMA, MAICD

Emeritus Professor Dr Mary Mahoney has given a lifetime of service to medical education, general practice training and to The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), particularly in the formative years of the Family Medicine Programme (FMP), serving as State Director Queensland for 25 years.

Her long-term involvement with the RACGP Queensland board, the University of Queensland (UQ) and the Australian Medical Association (AMA) has earned her well-deserved accolades.

Mary's contributions to advancing the status of women in medicine and advocating for children are well recognised.

Early days

Mary Hirschfeld was born in Brisbane. Her mother, Brigid Cooney, was an Irish nurse who met her father, Dr Konrad Hirschfeld, a thoracic surgeon and Rhodes Scholar from Brisbane, at the London Hospital. The couple married in Australia in 1939.

Konrad developed a close friendship with a colleague, obstetrician Dr Charles Marks, and they were both active contributors to medical education at the UQ. The UQ Marks-Hirschfeld Museum of Medical History is named in their honour.

The eldest of four girls, Mary grew up in the north side of Brisbane, attending St Cecilia's at Hamilton and later All Hallows School in the city. Mary was awarded a Commonwealth Scholarship to study medicine at UQ, graduating with an MBBS in 1963.

Family

Mary met her husband, medical student Patrick Mahoney, at a social tennis party. They dated throughout their years in medical school and were married in December 1965.

Mary had her first child, Deirdre, in 1966, followed by twins, Stephen and Rosaleen, in 1968. The youngest, Elizabeth, was born in 1970. That's four children all under the age of four years.

Patrick was equally busy, working full time and heavily committed to RACGP matters (refer to the biography of Dr Kevin Patrick Mahoney).

When asked how they juggled work and family life, Mary and Patrick spoke of babysitters, sharing the cooking and relying on very helpful and supportive grandparents. They told tales of chicken pox and mumps afflicting all of the children in the first year of Mary's state directorship, and studying for college exams at the dining room table after the kids have been put to bed. It's clear Mary and Patrick supported each other throughout their respective careers.

Career

Following her graduation in 1963, Mary worked for two years at the Royal Brisbane Hospital before taking on a neonatal paediatric registrar position at the Royal Children's Hospital in 1966.

After taking leave from her career from 1966 to 1970 to have her four children, Mary felt ready to return to part-time work, but was unable to find any.

She approached Dr Peter Schmidt on the Post Graduate Medical Education Committee (PGMEC) to enquire about a refresher course for women wanting to return to the workforce – and was told that such a course did not exist.

Dr Schmidt did, however, offer to develop a course if Mary could find enough women interested in undertaking it.

Mary recalls having ‘no trouble at all’ finding women who had been out of the workforce for up to 10 years. The course was run in 1970 and Mary was invited to join the PGMEC.

Mary was employed as a part-time medical officer with the Primary Care Department at the Royal Brisbane Hospital from 1970 to 1975. During this time, she also worked with the Department of Maternal and Child Welfare, as a junior research medical officer in the UQ Department of Child Health, and in part-time general practice at the West Brisbane Clinic.

In 1973, Mary did a three-month stint with WD Scott Management Consultants at the Royal Brisbane Hospital, completing a review on the efficiencies of workflow between nurses and doctors that provided valuable insight into workforce issues. Mary also worked as a visiting medical officer at the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital for many years.

Family Medicine Programme

The RACGP FMP commenced in 1973, and positions were quickly advertised. Mary applied and was appointed area coordinator for the Royal Brisbane Hospital, which required her to arrange educational events for trainees at the hospital. She was in this role for two years before she was engaged as the Assistant State Director. Mary was appointed as the State Director for Queensland in August 1976, a position she held for 25 years.

‘It was fantastic to be involved with the FMP from the word go. It was exciting, innovative and creative. We were allowed to be creative,’ Mary said. She attributes this excitement to National Director Dr Wes Fabb, who used to hold regular national meetings with all of the state directors to share ideas.

One innovative initiative was the delivery of medical education across Queensland and part of New South Wales through satellite broadcasting. A satellite dish was installed at the FMP office in Cribb Street, Milton, and was officially ‘opened’ by Lady Flo Bjelke-Petersen in 1986. Many great speakers presented to a studio audience, who would ask questions from the floor. The project, funded by Queensland Health, with medical educator Dr Peter Adkins as the coordinator, effectively raised the profile of the FMP.

Mary gained a reputation as a distance educator and was approached to be the Bank of New Zealand Visiting

Postgraduate Fellow under the auspices of the NZ Postgraduate Medical Education committee to travel around New Zealand in order to provide assistance with their distance education.

Other innovative approaches included external clinical training visits conducted via video conference, an initiative started by Dr Barbara Jones. The use of charter planes to deliver regional education sessions in far flung areas like Roma, Charleville, Mt Isa and Goondiwindi was another pioneering undertaking. Dr Keith Shaw often flew his own plane, taking consultants out to these towns to speak. Mary recalls that there was always a huge turnout of doctors who would come from miles around to attend.

Dr Janet Irwin started up Balint groups, running one for registrars and another for experienced GPs. There was initial friction between the FMP and the PGMEC, who told Mary that the FMP should only train registrars and could not run education courses for GPs. This did not last, however, as the value of including GPs in the education offerings was quickly realised.

Mary was a staunch advocate for part-time training, especially for female trainees, and for refresher training practices where people who had been away from medicine for an extended period could come and practise under supervision. There was initial resistance from practices who told Mary that patients did not want to see women doctors. However, as Mary recounts with a smile, ‘that soon changed.’

FMP Queensland was training around 200 trainees a year and Mary proudly name drops as she speaks of the GPs who have gone through under her stewardship. Dr John Golder was the first FMP trainee in Queensland, and there were many prominent GPs who were trainee liaison officers, including Professor Claire Jackson and Dr Clare Maher. Many of the trainees have gone on to be general practice supervisors and medical educators.

The FMP’s North Queensland office was set up and run by Dr Peter Doyle in 1975, providing essential support to trainees to the north and west of Townsville through area coordinators like Dr Pat Byrnes, Dr John DeVries and Dr Pam Ward. With the help of Dr Clark Munro, Mary set up Australia’s first academic registrar post in 1985, which has since seen the likes of Dr Kelsey Hegarty and Dr Michael Yelland passing through.

Mary was instrumental in defining the Certificate of Satisfactory Completion of Training as the end-point to general practice training and its associated credits towards the Fellowship of the RACGP (FRACGP) examination.

Regional Training Providers

General practice training was devolved from the RACGP to Regional Training Providers (RTPs) in 2001 – a time that Mary recalls as being sad and disappointing.

Mary was appointed as the RACGP representative on the board of the Central and Southern Queensland Training Consortium (CSQTC), which later changed its name to General Practice Training Queensland (GPTQ). She continued to influence general practice training through her 15 years on the board, during which time she served on the Finance and Audit Committee and was Deputy Chair and Treasurer. She was the GPTQ Chair for four years (2007–11) before retiring from the board in 2017.

RACGP

Mary was a member of the RACGP Queensland Board and executive in her capacity as State Director of FMP Queensland for 25 years. She was Faculty Vice-Chair for two years and a member of numerous committees, including Medical Education, Community and Preventative Medicine, Training Standards and Publications. Mary was also a member of the RACGP Exam Panel for over 20 years and was Queensland Provost 2004–08.

As Chair of the State Directors group, Mary also played a significant role on the RACGP Council. She chaired the college's National Research and Evaluation Ethics Committee (NREEC) for four years, and remains a member.

In recognition of her outstanding service to the RACGP, Mary was awarded the Rose–Hunt medal, the college's highest accolade, in 2001 and Life Fellowship of the RACGP in 2005. She was notably the first female to be awarded Life Fellowship.

In 2005, RACGP Queensland established the Mary Mahoney Examination Prize in her honour, awarded yearly to the Practice Eligible Route candidates who achieve the highest score in the clinical examination. Mary's contributions to general practice in Queensland were acknowledged with the 2013 RACGP Queensland Faculty Board Award.

Australian Medical Association

Mary joined the AMA shortly after graduation and served on the AMA Queensland Council for 10 years. She has contributed on multiple AMA committees, including Women and Medicine, Perinatal and Maternal Mortality, Membership, Community Health Centres, Medical Advisory and Fees Review. She also chaired the Medical Manpower Committee for seven years.

Mary provides an interesting perspective of how women were perceived during that time. She recollects often being the only woman at many of the meetings and was often ignored, at least initially. Anyone who knows Mary knows she is not easily ignored, and she was quickly recognised as a strong committee member worthy of attention. She learnt a lot about medical politics and remembers it as a fun time, meeting many people.

Mary's extensive contribution was recognised in 1985 when she was inducted into the AMA Roll of Fellows.

University of Queensland

Mary served on the UQ Senate for 24 years and was elected to two terms of the Deputy Chancellorship, the first woman to hold this office. Mary was also heavily involved with the Mayne Medical School, as a member of the Faculty of Medicine board for eight years and the Faculty of Health Sciences board for six years. In 1998–2001 she was a member of the Steering Committee on the inclusion of women's health as a discrete subject.

Mary was on the Mayne Medical School Education Committee at the time the medical course changed from undergraduate to post-graduate. This apparently caused a great deal of friction, especially with some of the consultants around town.

Mary was a member of the Standing Committee of Equity, Diversity and Status of Women of the UQ for 22 years, serving as its Chair 1997–2012. She was a member, and later Chair, of the Buildings and Grounds Committee and recalls two controversies that occurred during that time: when Mayne Hall ceased to be the location where graduations took place and instead became an art museum, and the contentious building of the Eleanor Schonell Bridge, which only allowed buses, cyclists and pedestrians.

In recognition of her service to medicine, UQ conferred on Mary an Honorary Doctorate of Medicine in 2005. She was appointed Adjunct Professor to the School of Medicine in 2009 and Emeritus Professor in 2014.

Mary's involvement with the UQ Alumni Association began in 1970 and continues to this day. She has served as President and Vice-President and has been on the executive of the Medical Alumni. She was awarded Honorary Life Membership in 2009 and was recognised as UQ Alumnus of the Year in 2016.

Medical education and advocacy

Mary has been on a variety of UQ education committees, ranging from curriculum planning, ethics and professional development, to rural health and community care. She has been a senior examiner for the Australian Medical Council for many years.

Mary was a member of the PGMEC of Queensland for 25 years, holding the position of Vice-Chair from 1990 to 1999.

Her interests go beyond our shores, with involvement in the Australasian and New Zealand Association for Medical Education from 1980 to 2014.

Mary has been an active member of the Australian Association of Academic General Practice for 20 years, serving as its Treasurer 1993–96.

Mary was a member of the Queensland Medical Education Council, the General Practice Advisory Council, the General Practice Liaison Council, the Queensland International Education Advisory board, the Queensland Council for Rural Medicine, the Committee of GP Services in Queensland Teaching and Major Provincial Hospitals and Committee for Training for Isolated Medical Practice. She was on the board of the Brisbane North Regional Health Authority and a member of the Medical Board of Queensland.

Mary helped shape the medical workforce over a 20-year involvement at the federal level. She was a member of the Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee, on the Steering Group of GP Workforce in Aboriginal Health, on the Specialist Recognition Advisory Committee, the GP Rural Incentives Program and the General Practice Advisory Council Access Taskforce.

Women and children

Mary dates her interests in women and children's health back to her early years as a neonatal paediatric registrar at a time when many children were put up for adoption. She has spent a lifetime supporting, encouraging and promoting better understanding and outcomes for women and children on a range of issues.

In her many committee roles, Mary relates 'speaking up at committee meetings to make sure that women had a voice'.

During her time as FMP State Director, Mary paved the way for part-time training and for women wanting to return to work after maternity leave. Her involvement in the UQ Standing Committee of Equity, Diversity and Status of Women over 20 years saw her strive for women's rights in university studies. Mary contributed to the inclusion of women's health as a discrete subject in the medical school curriculum. Mary was involved in the Medical Women's Society of Queensland, which ran conferences at the medical school, and was given Honorary Life Membership in 2004.

Mary has been a member of the Zonta International Club since 1978, a volunteer-based organisation whose

mission is to address women's issues in the local community and worldwide. She has been a member of the Zonta Club International Status of Women Committee, served on the board of the Brisbane branch and was elected as branch President in 1999–2000.

Mary was a member of her children's Parents and Friends Association during their school years. She was a member of the Board of Management of the Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland for 30 years and elected President 2000–13. In 2014, Mary's contributions to the association were recognised with the establishment of the Adjunct Professor Mary Mahoney AO Award for Excellence in Early Childhood Education and Care in Creche and Kindergarten.

Mary was a ministerial appointment on the Child Care Forum Queensland from 2004 to 2012. She was involved at the time the prep school year was brought in and reflects that this is a good initiative, but laments the loss of children's playtime. She was a member of the Advisory Committee of the Centre for Applied Studies in Early Childhood of Queensland University of Technology and a council member of the Brisbane Kindergarten Teachers College.

Did she ever say no?

'No. Because it was all very interesting.'

Mary particularly recalls the media elements as 'fun', appearing on Channel 9 TV show *Smoking* in 1985 and as the regular doctor on 'Dear Doctor', a fortnightly segment for the Channel 10 show *Living* throughout 1987.

After a stellar career, Mary is not one to stay idle. She continues to contribute on the executive of the UQ Alumni Association, the Marks–Hirschfeld Museum and the RACGP NREEC. She is also Deputy Chair of Leo's College Council and Deputy Chair of the Board of Trustees of Brisbane Girls Grammar School.

Dr Mary Mahoney has spent a lifetime contributing to medical education, general practice training and advancing women's and children's issues. She is a truly inspirational member of our professional home, the RACGP, and is a most worthy recipient of the Officer of the Order of Australia that was bestowed on her in 2006.

– Dr Eleanor Chew OAM, April 2019

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