

# *Dr John Gojko Radunovich*

## *OAM, 14 March 1932 –*

### *20 March 2014*

John Radunovich was born in Montenegro (Yugoslavia) in 1932. His father migrated to Australia in 1938 and by 1940 he had saved enough money to allow his wife, son and daughter to join him on his tobacco farm in Manjimup, WA. John spoke no English when he started school in WA as an 8 year old, yet by the age of 12 he had won a scholarship to Perth Modern School. However, that school's lack of boarding facilities saw John attend Scotch College instead. With no medical school in WA, John enrolled at Melbourne University.



John was a fine athlete and nearly represented Australia in shot put at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. He remained a keen and skilful golfer all his life.

John returned to WA and served his residency at Fremantle Hospital before heading to the rural town of Kununoppin, intending to stay for 2 years. As it turned out, he never left Kununoppin and served the town and the surrounding districts of Mukinbudin, Bencubbin and Beacon for 51 years. He delivered 1600 babies and performed more than 10,000 surgical procedures. He was never known to be bad tempered or to complain no matter what hour of the day or night he was called.

In his early years, John was a GP, surgeon, obstetrician, anaesthetist, psychiatrist and ambulance driver. If there was a real emergency, he would drive the ambulance to Perth, with the kids asleep in the front with him and his wife Marie in the back keeping an eye on the patient. Ambulances were a vital component of country medicine, so with his encouragement they were eventually purchased by the local residents of the districts of Kununoppin, Trayning, Nungarin, Mukinbudin, Bencubbin and Beacon.

All of the voluntary drivers had to have a first-aid certificate, so Dr John (as he was known) travelled to each of the towns to conduct the classes. He also precipitated the upgrade of the ex-RAAF airstrip in Kununoppin to provide an all-weather 24-hour facility for the Royal Flying Doctors Service.

He encouraged specialist visits so his patients would not have to travel to the city. The first such specialist visitor was Dr Don Webb, a noted orthopaedic surgeon. Their working relations and friendship lasted for more than 50 years; John would give the anaesthetic and Don would operate.

John was a mentor to many medical students and introduced them to the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for safe rural practice. In 1989 he joined the Board of Trustees of the Country Medical Foundation as a representative of rural doctors.

In 2007 he became the first medico to be inducted into the prestigious Agricultural Hall of Fame in recognition of his efforts to improve the provision of medical care to WA's agricultural community.

At his Kununoppin jubilee celebration in September 2008, his nearest medical neighbour for 28 years, Dr Frank Kubicek, from Wyalkatchem (60 km away), recalled that: 'In the wheat and sheep boom days, Dr Radunovich provided medical services to a district population of 4000. These days it would take five city GPs or three country doctors to manage that workload. John did it on his own. For him, medicine was a calling, not a job.'

John was a modest man, but he had a stubborn streak and was capable of a pithy anecdote. In 1992 he gave a talk to the WA Country Medical Foundation on the changes he had seen in the provision of general practice services to the country.

'When I set up practice in Kununoppin in 1958, the hospital was administered by a teenage girl working 3 days a week, the acute bed average was 20 and if I had a problem, the Health Department would solve it. Today, the bed average is 14.5, a number that includes 10 residents in the permanent facility, the hospital administration requires 3.6 full-time employees and if ever I have a problem, the Health Department has almost certainly caused it.'

John joined the RACGP in 1972 but let his membership lapse in 2001. Nevertheless, he was invited to give the 2009 William Arnold Conolly oration, the RACGP's premier speech of the year. Unfortunately, however, he left his prompt pages at home and was disappointed that this impacted on his usually polished presentation.

John Radunovich was one of the last of the old-style country GPs and is sadly missed by his patients, most of whom were also his friends. He is a legend of WA rural medicine. He is survived by his wife Marie, children Luke, Penelope and Antigone and three grandchildren, Marcus, Antony and Miranda.

John's funeral on 28 March 2014 was attended by more than 1500 mourners, including several people he had delivered himself.

*E/Professor Max Kamien AM, CitWA Provost, WA-RACGP*