

Philip Kessly

MBBS, FRACGP

16 February 1922 – 14 August 2004

Dr Philip Kessly passed away on 4 August 2004 in Perth, Western Australia, after a long illness. His career was conspicuous for his dedication to community, family and the art and science of medicine.

Philip was born in London on 16 February 1922, as the 11th of 12 children to Abraham and Sarah Kessly, Jewish migrants who had fled the early 20th century pogroms of their native Ukraine. He was educated in London, Merseyside and Manchester.

In 1937 Philip took an apprenticeship in pharmacy, which he finished in 1940. After completing his studies, he voluntarily enlisted in the British army, where he worked on radar and later went to India, returning to England in 1946. Following the demobilisation of the British armed forces, Philip undertook studies in medicine, his great passion in life, in Edinburgh, Scotland, graduating in 1951. He earned a prize in clinical surgery and high distinctions in physiology and public health.

Following a year of residency at the Southport General Infirmary in Merseyside, followed by a year in a trainee assistantship in general practice, Philip joined a general practice in Birkenhead, Merseyside, as a junior partner.

Philip and his family migrated to our shores in 1956 after seeing an advertisement at Savoy House in London, and he soon joined the practice of the late Dr Walter Winterton in Mt Hawthorn, WA. Philip worked in a practice in Yokine, then an outer suburb of Perth, between 1957 and 1986, until ill health forced him to seek out a quieter working environment. He continued to work in the suburb of Como until shortly before his death in 2004.

Philip's attitude to medicine had been profoundly affected by the death of his elder brother from diphtheria and his first son from nephritis in the pre-steroid era.

In addition to running a very busy general practice, Philip involved himself in other aspects of medicine. From 1960 to 1972 he was a clinical assistant in dermatology at the Royal Perth Hospital and also lectured to the Department of Social Work at the University of Western Australia from 1977 to 1979. He also recognised the importance of passing on his skills and was a foundation part-time senior lecturer in the newly founded University of Western Australian Department of General Practice.



Philip was actively involved in many political aspects of Australian medicine. He served on the Branch Council of the Australian Medical Association (AMA) in WA from 1972 to 1982 and was the State President of the AMA in 1975. He was Chairman of Convocation, WA AMA Branch Council, from 1976 to 1980 and an AMA Federal Councillor for 5 years. He was elected a Fellow of the AMA in 1979.

Philip was passionate about the need to recognise general practice as a special discipline and was one of the original activists who established the WA Faculty of the RACGP. He was a member of the RACGP's WA Faculty Board from 1964 to 1980, founding editor of the WA-RACGP State Bulletin and was a member of the RACGP Council in 1972. He was also Provost of the WA-FRACGP from 1976 to 1978.

Philip swam for exercise and enjoyment and was a regular at the Beatty Park Aquatic Centre, easily recognisable by his white robe, snorkel and mask.

His sharp intellect, vast general knowledge and commitment and compassion to medical practice were inspirational to medical students, whom he taught with vigour and enthusiasm at his general practice in Yokine.

Philip and his wife Lilian had four children: Michael, who died in infancy; David, who is a forensic biologist in NSW; Jennifer, who is a school teacher and Hilary, also a school teacher.

It can be said with certainty that Australian medicine was fortunate to have benefitted from the contribution and enthusiasm of Dr Philip Kessly.

Dr Peter Winterton, Professor Max Kamien

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