

Dr Raoul de Crespigny Tunbridge OAM



Born 15 May 1927, Melbourne. Died 1 Aug 2019, Melbourne.

As a GP for 60 years, Dr Raoul de Crespigny Tunbridge lived a long and full life, contributing much to the lives of family, friends and colleagues, and to the community and our nation.

He was a believer in the 'general' part of general practice and trained at a time when many graduates would start in general practice then proceed to a specialty or general practice with special interests. His special interests included procedural general practice, medical education, medical politics and administration, flying and aviation medicine.

He will be remembered most for his systematic approach to emergency medicine and for being an iconic pioneer in the discipline of disaster medicine in Victoria and Australia.

He was a modest man, and his extensive skills and abilities earned him respect from his colleagues.

Family

Raoul was son of the late Walter and Lorna Tunbridge, and brother to Barbara Grice. He and his beloved wife, Christine, became proud parents to sons Anthony, Nicholas and David, and proud grandparents to Edward, Victoria, Jasmine, Luc, Claire, Daniel, Josh, William, Robert, Bethany and John.

Achievements

Among his many involvements:

- Raoul was an active member of the RACGP, with multiple senior roles. He served on many RACGP committees, including as a member of the Faculty Board from 1984–1992, and as Faculty Chairman and Faculty Provost.
- He was Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Academy of General Practice. He oversaw the accreditation and supervision of general practice training facilities before the Family Medicine Program was established.

- He coordinated with the RACGP and Monash University to provide training of undergraduate medical students in general practice.
- He worked on the systematic prevention, preparedness and response to local, state and national emergencies and disasters, for which he was awarded an OAM in 1990 for services to medicine and the creation of the State Disaster Plan.
- He was a major contributor to the first edition of the Australian emergency manual for disaster medicine, published in 1995 by EMA Emergency Medicine Australia.
- He held a commercial pilot's licence from 1979 and was a designated aviation medical examiner from 1975–2015 and a fierce advocate for the fair treatment of pilots.

Background and professional roles

Raoul attended Melbourne University from 1946 until 1952, graduating MBBS and BSc. He was resident at Prince Henry's Hospital from 1952–1954, then started general practice in Traralgon in 1955. He was founder and Practice Principal of Langton Medical Centre in Dandenong from 1956–1980.

At Dandenong and District Hospital (1965–83), he was:

- member of Committee of Management, 1965–83
- Vice-President from, 1967–68
- President, 1969
- Medical Director, 1980
- Director of Emergency Services, 1981
- Clinical Supervisor of Emergency Department, 1981–85
- Emeritus Consultant, 1985.

At Monash University (1965–73) he was Chairman of the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Teaching Program.

From 1976–2015 he was designated Aviation Medical Examiner for Australia and Papua New Guinea, with roles including:

- Moorabbin Airport Occupational Health Consultant, 1981–2015
- Collins Street Medical Practice from, 2000–14
- Southend Medical Centre, Hampton, 2014–15

At Frankston Community Hospital, Raoul was consultant from 1980 until retirement. He worked in private practice in Mt Eliza, including involvement with medical examinations for the Australian Maritime Safety Authority from 1980–90.

His involvement with the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services included as Chief Medical Commander Medical Displan Victoria from 1980–95; Principal Consultant, Rural Health Task Force from 1980–95; and Chairman, Functional Sub Plan, Medical Displan from 1983–85.

At the Commonwealth Department of Health, Housing and Community Services, Raoul was Counter Disaster Planning and Response Consultant from 1980–95.

With the Victorian Academy of General Practice, he was Medical Executive Officer from 1984–89 and then Chief Executive Officer from 1989–94.

Raoul also was involved with the Victorian Metropolitan Ambulance Service, on the Board of Management from 1986–93, including as Vice-President from 1988–91 and President from 1991–93.

At Tower Hill Medical Centre in Frankston, Raoul worked part time as a GP from 1990–2000.

A personal reflection

By Associate Professor Chris Hogan

It is hard for me to write this as I knew Raoul and worked with him and had the upmost regard and respect for him. As is common with modest people, I had no idea of the extent of his activities and involvements until I heard his eulogy.

He was a gentleman and I never heard him raise his voice even when I would have thought it very justified. He could recognise talent and was able to effectively delegate. He could always see opportunities to improve systems. He was able to bring groups of people together to institute and maintain improvements.

At Medical Displan Victoria, where Raoul was Chief Medical Commander from 1980–1995, there were 12 Metropolitan Area Medical Commanders and 45 rural Area Medical Commanders with two psychologists. The doctors were GPs, anaesthetists, emergency department directors and emergency department personnel. It was our task to be involved with the various municipal disaster response groups for counter disaster planning. In the event of a disaster, it was our task to attend a site and convey information back to the Chief Medical Commander or their Deputy. We had to answer three questions:

- What is actually happening?
- What resources can be brought to the scene in a timely manner?
- How do we do that?

We liaised with the other services to coordinate the onsite medical response using all available and relevant local, municipal, state and federal resources up to and including the military. We dealt with bushfires; major fires; major collisions (planes, trains and road vehicles); toxic spills; radiation incidents; mass gatherings, including rock concerts; and major police incidents, including sieges, mass shootings and other threats.

Raoul presided over this diverse but determined and dedicated group with finesse, charm and wisdom. He guided us to bring out the best in ourselves and to rely on the support of our colleagues.

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and seas on which we work and live, and pay our respects to Elders, past, present and future.

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