

Ronald Valentine Trubuhovich: champion of intensive care medicine

Ross C Freebairn

The citation delivered on presentation of the Medal of the Joint Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine to Dr Ron Trubuhovich at the Faculty's annual scientific meeting in Sydney, June 2007

It is my great privilege to provide the following citation on the occasion of the award of the Joint Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine (JFICM) Medal to Dr Ronald Valentine Trubuhovich. This Medal is awarded to honour an outstanding clinician and a dedicated leader, who has been a champion of the discipline of intensive care medicine as it has developed from infancy to become a recognised specialty in New Zealand and Australia.

Ron was born in New Plymouth in 1929 and graduated from the University of New Zealand with a Bachelor of Dental Surgery in 1953, before returning to complete his Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery and Bachelor of Medical Science in 1961. He then travelled to the United Kingdom as a Nuffield Dominion Scholar, where he gained an Anaesthetic Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1966 and a Master of Science from Oxford University in 1968. He returned to the Antipodes in 1968, to the Acute Respiratory Unit at Auckland Hospital — the forerunner of the Department of Critical Care Medicine — where he began his long and extraordinarily dedicated working life in the care of critically ill patients. The DCCM, as it became known, was later to develop into a centre of excellence, and was a well-worn step on the path of many Australian and New Zealand intensivists. Ron, along with Matt Spence, built the foundations.

Ron first worked as the Deputy Medical Officer in Charge, then from 1979 to 1983 as Clinician in Charge of the satellite intensive care unit, followed by Chairman of DCCM from 1983 until 1994. Despite “retiring” in 1994, he continued working until 1998, before finally relinquishing the title of New Zealand’s oldest working intensivist.

Ron was a foundation member of the Australian and New Zealand Intensive Care Society (ANZICS), and has held the executive roles of Vice President (1977–1981) and President (1981–1982). Ron became a Fellow of the Faculty of Anaesthetists of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (FARACS) in 1982, with a Fellowship endorsed in intensive care, and was soon involved in Faculty affairs. He was an intensive care examiner (from 1987 until 2000). Ron’s spartan approach to life became legendary during his examining years, when he preferred to stay in backpacker-type accommodation in Melbourne, rather than waste the College’s or Faculty’s resources on what he regarded as extravagant accommodation for such a functional activity as sleep.

He was an executive member of the Section of Intensive Care, FARACS, commencing in 1987, and was Chairman from 1991 until its dissolution in 1993. He was intimately involved in the working party that oversaw the formation of the Faculty of Intensive Care in 1992, and was interim Vice Dean 1993–1994. He was elected Vice Dean of the Faculty from 1994 to 1996, and the Faculty ASM and Communication Officer from 1997 to 2000.

From a New Zealander’s perspective, Ron’s contribution to intensive care has been outstanding. As a member of New Zealand’s “regional” committee of the Faculty of Anaesthetists, he was instrumental in establishing the New Zealand National Committee of the Faculty of Intensive Care, serving as its inaugural Chair from 1994 to 1998, and then Vice Chair until 2000. His role was crucial in developing the specialty in New Zealand, and he displayed considerable effort, enormous energy and characteristic tenacity. These attributes, and his dedication, resulted in intensive care medicine becoming recognised as an independent branch of medicine in October 1999. It is fitting that Ron was the first to be granted vocational registration in intensive care medicine.

Ron has always had a tremendously positive influence on the various intensive care bodies that he served and on those who served with him. Ron’s meticulous attention to detail, his quest for accuracy and his encyclopaedic knowledge have been invaluable assets in many discussions, submissions and policies in which he has been involved over the years. These traits have made the compilation of this citation surprisingly stressful for me!

Despite retiring from the Board of the Faculty and clinical intensive care practice, Ron remains active as the Honorary Historian for ANZICS and for the New Zealand National Committee of the Joint Faculty, and continues to produce extensively researched articles on historical aspects of intensive care, which is a particular interest.

Despite demands on his time in his professional life and unwavering commitment to his patients, Ron has always been a warm, generous, approachable human being, considerate of doctors, nurses, and others with whom he worked. He has remained a unique, interesting, well-rounded person, with a dry wit and an excellent sense of humour in adversity. Ron has a wide range of non-medical

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interests and abilities, and a seemingly unquenchable thirst for learning.

Whether it was as a clinician, a patient advocate, a counsellor to colleagues, a role model for his juniors or elder statesman of intensive care, Ron has always gone beyond the call of duty, but, in his typically self-effacing manner, he has never sought great rewards for what he has done. We are indeed privileged to have Ron as one of our founding fathers.

We are particularly pleased that his family could join us tonight: his wife Elizabeth, daughter May and her husband John, daughter Eve and son Matthew. Thank you for helping us celebrate Ron's achievements.

Mr Dean, it is my great pleasure to present to you Dr Ronald Valentine Trubuhovich, a worthy recipient of the JFICM Medal.

Acknowledgements

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