

EDITORIAL

It started from scratch The first 50 years of the Australasian College of Dermatologists

The Australasian College of Dermatologists evolved from two organisations – the British Association of Dermatology and the Dermatological Association of Australia – which were formed in the 1920s and 1940s respectively.¹ As these organisations began to discuss the formation of a College in the early 1960s, they were joined by the New Zealand Dermatological Society. On 19 November 1966 the first meeting of the interim council of the Australasian College of Dermatologists was held with John Belisario as President. *It Started from Scratch* takes up the story of the College from that point. The

publication, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the College, charts five distinct periods of development in the College's history.

SETTING THE FOUNDATIONS – 1967 TO 1977

The founders of the Australasian College of Dermatologists were determined to extend, improve and initiate training courses for dermatologists in Australia and New Zealand; to raise the status of the speciality amongst medical circles and to gain recognition of the College's qualifications by Australian and New Zealand medical authorities at a time when recognition of medical qualifications was largely the domain of the state medical boards.² These ambitions for the College were partly fuelled by the founders' perception that dermatology was not highly regarded as a speciality in Australian medical circles.³

There were only three women amongst the 90 foundation College members. Discussions at Council meetings during these foundation years were often 'robust' as the founding councillors and office-bearers laid the foundations for achieving the College's aims. They paid meticulous attention to refining the College's Articles of Association and rules, defining the eligibility for membership of the College and developing a first-class training system. Regional faculties of the College – charged with negotiating with local medical boards and hospitals – quickly began to develop their own unique characteristics.

The inaugural Board of Censors, led by Eric Taft, developed not only a training system, but also the syllabus and examination program. There was general agreement that training should be state-based and offered through registrar positions in hospitals approved by the College. Convincing state government authorities of the desirability of subsidising training posts for dermatologists was no easy task. The Victorian faculty initially bridged this gap using sponsorship from pharmaceutical companies and by rotating trainees around teaching hospitals. Western Australia and South Australia also adopted the rotation system. By 1978 there were 25 College-accredited training posts in Australasia.

Initially the training period was set at 2 years, which was increased to 3 years in 1972, with part-time training having been ruled out.⁴ Amongst the many subjects that trainee dermatologists were expected to conquer, the use of 'radiotherapy for the treatment of diseases of the skin' figured prominently. Originally known as the MACD, the College's qualification was renamed the FACD in 1973, when College members were redesignated as College fellows.



Figure 1 Australasian College of Dermatologist's annual conferencing ceremony fifty years after the inauguration of the College in the Great Hall, University of Sydney.

CONSOLIDATING – 1978 TO 1988

New surgery techniques for removing skin cancers were being explored and the 1980s saw the introduction of new cosmetic treatments including lasers and collagen injections. New medications radically changed the treatment of many chronic skin conditions.⁵

In 1985 the federal government established the Australian Medical Council (AMC) to replace the Australian Medical Examining Council, the British Medical Council and the National Specialist Qualification Advisory Committee. In anticipation of the more rigorous oversight of medical training to come, the College made the significant decision to extend dermatology training from 3 to 4 years, hoping that a 4 year course might be the solution to the high failure rate for the part two examination at this time.⁶

By the early 1980s College membership was approaching 200 but there was still a shortage of dermatologists in most Australian states.⁷ The establishment of the Skin and Cancer Foundations in Sydney and Melbourne boosted the number of training places over the ensuing years, but dermatologists still struggled to meet the demand for their services, particularly outside the major metropolitan areas.⁸

A growing dissatisfaction with the training of dermatologists in New Zealand, led some College members to negotiate with the Royal Australasian College of Physicians to place dermatology training in New Zealand under the auspices of that body.⁹ This was unacceptable to many Australian College members and, after many heated Council meetings, the New Zealand faculty was formally dissolved in November 1986. New Zealand fellows of the College became eligible to join one of the Australian faculties.

In 1988 the College celebrated the milestone establishment of a Professorial Chair in Dermatology at the University of Sydney – the first in Australia – with the appointment of Professor Ross Barnetson. College had begun working toward this goal in the 1960s, but despite the efforts of John Belisario and subsequent office bearers, raising sufficient funds to establish a Chair had been a significant hurdle.

EXPLORING BROADER HORIZONS – 1989 TO 1997

In the 1990s the College adopted an increasingly international outlook. There were increasing opportunities, funded by bequests and donations, for fellows and trainees to travel overseas for training or study, returning with refreshed awareness of developments in new dermatological frontiers. For the first time the College allowed limited accreditation for training achieved overseas.¹⁰ The College's successful bid to hold the 19th World Congress of Dermatology in Sydney in 1997 cemented Australian dermatology's place on the international stage.

As the number of fellows continued to rise, so too did the proportion of female fellows. There were renewed efforts to promote collegiality and inclusiveness amongst

College fellows, with trainees actively encouraged to participate in the College's annual scientific meetings. *The Mole* newsletter was introduced to keep fellows informed and in-touch in an informal manner. The College's professional development program was supplemented by the introduction of a biennial Spring meeting.

Overseas connections contributed to the continued flowering of sub-specialities, such as dermatological surgery, paediatric dermatology, occupational dermatology, dermatopathology and immunology, in the 1980s and 1990s.¹¹ The College Council gave measured support for the development of these subspecialties, approving of the formation of a Surgical Committee to organise advanced training in Mohs surgical techniques for fellows in 1989, for instance.¹² Laser therapy to treat a limited number of specific skin conditions was similarly approved by the Council at this time.

Emerging treatments had an impact on the training and examination of candidates for the FACD. The surgical syllabus was updated to reflect the wider knowledge and experience of surgical techniques now expected of dermatologists and trainees were required to keep logs of surgical procedures they had performed.¹⁵ At about the same time access to radiotherapy training in some states became limited as state governments modified their licensing requirements.

The Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee (AMWAC), established by the federal government in 1995, highlighted the inadequate provision of medical services in rural and remote areas of Australia.¹⁴

CHANGES IN THE AIR – 1998 TO 2006

By the end of the 1990s administration of College was becoming more complex and the decision was made to appoint a Chief Executive Officer. The College then developed a strategic plan for the future. New initiatives included a finance committee to assist the Honorary Treasurer, a website committee and an IT focus group working on improved communications and access to resources online via the College's website.¹⁵ The strategic plan also introduced the idea of replacing the representative council with a smaller board of directors appointed 'on interest and merit'. This major change met with some resistance from fellows but was eventually accepted with modified faculty representation.¹⁶ In 2006, as Anne Howard became the first female President, College fellows passed the new constitution and a new era in governance began.¹⁷

In 1997 the Board of Censors had begun the process of implementing a formal curriculum to provide 'a blueprint for training in Australia', but there was now an imperative to deliver a training program acceptable to the AMC.¹⁸ A comprehensive training handbook was developed along with a training program record book to record all aspects of the procedural dermatology syllabus.¹⁹ A training subcommittee was established with each faculty having a Director of Training to liaise with the Chief Censor.²⁰ Each of these innovations signalled a fundamental change to the training process.

As competition for training positions increased, College took steps to improve the selection process which was handled by state faculties. By 2006 a centralised national selection process was in place. The lack of training places in the major teaching hospitals remained a problem, despite the extra training positions established by the Skin and Cancer Foundations in New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland. College fellows vigorously debated a proposition to establish some dermatology training positions in private practice.²¹ After undertaking a pilot project in 1999, College cautiously agreed to the concept in 2001.²²

College's income was projected to exceed \$1 million by 2001 with the major component flowing from the annual scientific meeting (ASM) which now included a substantial trade show. Indeed, funds raised through the ASMs provided College with a stable financial base. This healthy financial position assisted College to develop an efficient and appropriately-qualified administrative team. This, in turn, ultimately provided better services to trainees and fellows and raised the public profile of dermatology.

COMING OF AGE – 2007 TO 2016

For the College, 2007 signalled a coming of age. A new board was functioning well, having crossed the divide from a managerial role to a body focussed on strategies and future directions, while the CEO and the administration team now relieved the board of many bureaucratic tasks and facilitated the smooth running of the College. AMC accreditation, achieved in the same year, offered fresh opportunities to continue refining the College's training, examination and continuing professional development programs.

The board forged on with the process of change and by 2011 the time was right to review and refine the constitution. The honorary treasurer's role was removed, a non-dermatologist director was added to the board and directors were allotted portfolios. It was resolved that there would be only one board – the Board of Directors – and that all other boards would become committees. The most significant of these changes was for the Board of Censors which became the National Examination Committee.²³

In 2015 board members recognised an opportunity to foster another major change in governance. This was to have a board fully constituted on the basis of skills and merit rather than faculty representation. It was a move that needed to be handled sensitively and President Stephen Shumack and CEO, Tim Wills, worked hard to convince fellows around Australia of the need to reduce the size of the board, ensure that board members were 'fit for task' and to accept an increase in the number of non-fellow directors.²⁴ This historic change was voted in under the presidency of Chris Baker, in December 2015. A subsequent change was the establishment of a representative committee, with representatives from every faculty, to act as an adjunct advisory committee to the board.²⁵

AMC accreditation brought further refinements to the College's training and examination processes. The College's curriculum was rewritten in line with contemporary educational thought and best-practice, with fellows

across Australia defining the key skills, knowledge and competencies required for qualification as a dermatologist. College education staff shaped this material into learning outcomes. The newly-organised curriculum documents made the requirements for success in the College's final examinations transparent to both trainees and trainee supervisors alike. Increased use of technology, such as the College's e-portal, contributed to the revision of examination methods, with greater emphasis placed on continuing assessment throughout the training period. The redeveloped curriculum also underpinned changes to the College's continuing professional development program, which, under AMC requirements, became mandatory. Along with clinical skills, 'professional' skills, such as communication, ethics and cultural awareness, became essential areas for ongoing professional development.

AMC reaccreditation required that trainers and training supervisors have some degree of educational training. The College sought and successfully achieved accreditation as a Registered Training Organisation in 2014. In 2016, the College became the first Australian medical college to achieve higher education provider (HEP) status. By this time, the College had begun to offer post-fellowship training in Mohs micrographic surgery to its fellows.

Changing frontiers in diagnosis and treatment of skin conditions, shifting standards in education, demands in the medico-political context and changing demographic patterns were some of the factors which impacted on the College's traditions over five decades. In adapting to changes, however, College fellows had held firmly to the ambitions of the founding members to ensure that Australasian dermatologists were trained to provide the best quality care for their patients.

**Jill Barnard and
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Notes

¹ Tessa Milne outlined the formation of the Australasian College of Dermatologists in detail in *From Clique to College, a history of the foundation of the Australasian College of Dermatologists*, Blackwell Science Asia, Carlton, 1999.

² John C Belisario, 'Inaugural Oration Australasian College of Dermatologists', *The Australasian Journal of Dermatology*, Vol IX, No, 1, June 1967.

³ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁴ ACD Council Minutes, 18–19 March 1972.

⁵ Warren Weightman interviewed by Sonia Jennings, 17 June 2016.

⁶ ACD Council report to AGM 1984, ACD Council Minutes, 27 April 1985.

⁷ ACD Council Report, 2 May 1978.

⁸ ACD Council Minutes, 8 November 1986.

⁹ Minutes of ACD Interim Council meeting, 25 November 1975.

¹⁰ *The Mole*, Winter 1990.

¹¹ *The Mole*, Autumn 1989.

¹² ACD Report of Council, 1989.

- ¹³ ACD Report of Council, 1987.
- ¹⁴ *The Mole*, Spring 1995.
- ¹⁵ ACD Annual Report 2000–01.
- ¹⁶ ACD Council Minutes, 10 November 2001.
- ¹⁷ John Auld interviewed by Jill Barnard and Sonia Jennings, 8 August 2016.
- ¹⁸ ACD Council Minutes, 15 May 1999.
- ¹⁹ Information supplied by John Auld to the authors, March 2017.
- ²⁰ ACD Annual Report 1997–98.
- ²¹ This came out of an Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee report: The Specialist Dermatology Workforce in Australia (1998).
- ²² *The Mole*, Spring 1998.
- ²³ ACD Board Minutes, 4 April 2012 and ACD Annual Report 2011–12.
- ²⁴ ACD Annual Report 2015.
- ²⁵ Chris Baker interviewed by Jill Barnard and Sonia Jennings, 20 May 2016.
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