



Doctors Service Awards

RURAL HEALTH WEST LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP AWARD

In 2012 Rural Health West is acknowledging a rural general practitioner and professor, who has been instrumental in the development of State and Federal policies and organisations who are focused on recruiting and retaining health professionals to rural and remote Australia.

This notable medical practitioner and academic has achieved a great many things since he was one of the first students to complete the new medical course introduced at the University of Western Australia in 1959.

He was the first of these students to gain a rural GP attachment, convincing his Professor to send him rural- he went to Collie and 'learnt a lot'.

From 1970-73 he was a physician, psychiatrist, paediatrician and GP anaesthetist to several far-west towns in NSW, as well as the GP to the Aboriginal population of Bourke. His book about this experience ('The Dark People of Bourke- the doctor as an agent of social change') resulted in his employment at the University of Western Australia and appointment as the Foundation Professor of General Practice, the first Chair of General Practice in Australia. He remained in this role for 27 years.

Upon taking the Chair's role, his first task was to convince the curriculum committee to bring in a compulsory one month country attachment for all final year medical students.

After some strategic politicking, a Ministerial Inquiry into the Recruitment and Retention of Country Doctors was undertaken by this doctor in 1987 and the final report (known as the 'Kamien Report') presented the evidence base for Western Australia and by implication the rest of Australia.

The report was printed with 800 copies distributed- the Professor had requested 1500- and they soon became a collector's item. A Queensland doctor ignored the copyright law, got several hundred copies reprinted, and sold them to the author for \$15 each!

The report resulted in the establishment of the Western Australian Centre for Remote and Rural Medicine, which has now morphed into Rural Health West. The Professor harassed the first director to set up a rural student's club, to provide solidarity for student contemplating a career in rural medicine, and also provide a measure of input into the curriculum of the medical school. Established in 1990, the first nationals conference was held in Kalgoorlie in 1991 and there are now 29 health clubs around Australia covering all health disciplines and supported by the Federal Government.

This professor was also instrumental in advocating for medical schools to have more focus on providing exposure to rural medicine. This was done through the establishment of the Federal Government's Rural Incentives Program. \$2.5 million was set aside for a Rural Undergraduate Steering Committee, and due to the small committee numbers (5 including the professor) was able to achieve a great deal.

This Professor has also had around 200 academic papers published, wrote the 1979 Report for the House of Representatives recommending direct funding of Aboriginal Medical Services, was a consultant for the World Health Organisation on methods for improving and measuring the social responsiveness of medical schools and other health professional institutions, is currently an honorary senior research fellow at the University of Western Australia, Provost, Archivist and Corlis Fellow of the WA Faculty of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Buddy doctor for Rural Health West, providing regular locum tenens in Kununurra and was the oldest ever ship's doctor completing seven polar trips!

For his contribution to the profession of general practice and his commitment and dedication to rural practice, Rural Health West would like to acknowledge the many contributions of Emeritus Professor Max Kamien.