



## THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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### **Bro. Dr. DONALD MELVYN SHELDON, MB, BS, FRCS. (1937-2007)**

It is sad that we learn so much more about our close friends in death than we ever did in life. The many-faceted life of Bro. Dr. Don Sheldon is a prime example, as became obvious to his friends, and perhaps even to his family, between his diagnosis of carcinoma of the lung in July last year and his death.



Dedicated ... Don Sheldon.

Most medical colleagues knew of his superb proficiency in surgery of the gastrointestinal tract, his wonderful ability to teach, his clear mind, his selflessness in his work in Vietnam and his preparedness to go to Iraq to clarify the circumstances around the death of Private Jake Kovco.

His friends in the Southern Highlands town of Robertson knew, perhaps more about his farming and grazing abilities.

As friends met his family for the first time in the last months of his life, different facets of his life were revealed, showing a man who had given much in so many areas, and had so much more to give.

Donald Melvyn Sheldon's parents were school teachers and his father came from an agricultural background in the Southern Highlands.

Born in Dulwich Hill, Don went to Canterbury Boys' High School, where he was vice-captain and an outstanding sportsman. He started his medical career at Sydney University, graduating in 1960 and becoming a junior resident medical officer at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. Sheldon did his surgical training at Royal Prince Alfred, apart from one year in England with the great surgeon Rodney Smith, Before becoming an honorary surgeon at RPA in 1969.

He topped his primary surgical fellowship exam and won the Gordon Gordon-Taylor Prize for being the best candidate from Australia and New Zealand. During his study he met and married Pam Guard.

He led a surgical unit of doctors from RPA who volunteered to form the Third Australian Surgical Aid Team to Vietnam in 1967. He also worked over the years to provide thoracic surgical services in Port Moresby.

Sheldon had an abiding, and at times fierce, determination to serve not only his patients well but to enable the medical profession to offer independent, truthful and reliable advice and service to patients. With many of his colleagues, he feared

intrusion into the doctor/patient relationship by big business, as seen in America, or by governments, as seen in many other countries.

In his crusade for an independent profession, he was elected in 1984 to the council of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons, where he endeavoured to keep the college sheltered from excessive government influence. He became responsible for the college's continuing medical education and continuing professional development programs, receiving the ESR Hughes Medal for his services to the college, its fellows and its patients. Later, he was also awarded the President's Medal of the Australian Medical Association and the first gold Bruce Shepherd Medal of the Australian Doctors' Fund for his services to medicine. He was, for a period, the NSW chairman of the Australian Association of Surgeons.

He travelled to Iraq last year to help assess the circumstances of Private Kovco's death and the return of his body to Australia. He discussed very little of the journey but expressed great admiration and compassion for Kovco's fellow soldiers.

Sheldon also served as the only doctor on the Justice David Ipp's committee in 2002 to look at ways of limiting the liability of people who negligently cause injury or death to others, and to cap damages payouts. He resurrected the Council of Procedural Specialists, which has continued and amplified the work he was doing, and supported the Australian Doctors' Fund in dealing with problems associated with the medical profession.

A few days before his death, at 70, he was discussing remedies for the continuing threats to the doctor/patient relationship.

Bro. Don Sheldon died on 16 March 2007 and is survived by his wife, Pam, and their children Tracey, Lachlan, Katy and James and 13 grandchildren, as well as his twin sister, Del, sister June and brother, Bruce.

## **MASONIC HISTORY**

Bro. Dr. Donald Melvyn Sheldon was made a mason in Lodge University of Sydney No. 544 on 27 July 1973. He was passed Fellowcraft on 9 August 1973 and raised a Master Mason on 28 June 1974.

He served as a member of the Board of Directors of the NSW Masonic Hospital from June 1982 until 1999.

The rank of Past Grand Director of Music was conferred on 9 September 1987.

## **REFERENCES**

The Sydney Morning Herald 12/13 May 2007.  
United Grand Lodge of NSW and the ACT - Membership records.