

# CLUSTER

Newsletter of the  
University of Melbourne's  
Clinical Departments at  
Royal Melbourne and  
Western Hospitals



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

# CHRONICLE

## BENCH TO BEDSIDE RESEARCH

**ISSUE 2**  
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**INSIDE**

Remembering Esteemed  
Neurosurgeon, Peter Petty  
PhD Graduate Wins  
Prestigious Parmley Prize  
Landmark Leukemia Study  
Published in Science

The RMH/WH Cluster consists of the University of Melbourne's clinical departments of Surgery, Medicine, Psychiatry and Radiology based at the Royal Melbourne and Western Hospitals.

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## Surgeon's delicate touch had a lasting impact



Re-printed courtesy of The Age

PETER Petty, a skilful and innovative surgeon and teacher who played a key role in the development of neurosurgery in Australia, has died of a heart attack in the driveway of his holiday home Balnarring on the Mornington Peninsula, aged 75.

From before his appointments in 1967 as assistant neurosurgeon at both The Royal Melbourne Hospital and Prince Henry's Hospital to beyond his retirement from operative neurosurgery 10 years ago, he taught at graduate and post-graduate level. The later stint guided two further generations of Australian neurosurgeons.

Born in Melbourne to Alice (nee Patterson) and Valentine Petty, the eldest of five siblings, he was educated at Deepdene State School and East Kew Central School before winning a scholarship to Scotch College.

His parents were children of the Depression and he was the first of his family to go to university, paving the way for his four siblings to also obtain tertiary qualifications.

From a young age he displayed manual and technical skills that he would later draw on as a surgeon. He carved models of World War II aircraft in precise detail from balsa wood, and built crystal radio sets on which he followed the progress of the war as the Japanese forces reached New Guinea and bombed Darwin.

He discovered the magazine, *Popular Mechanics*, and taught himself electronics. He constructed powerful amplifiers and housed them in beautifully handcrafted cabinets. He was also a car buff. There were always bodies of cars in the backyard of the family home undergoing transplants of one part or another.

Peter drove in car rallies such as the Ampol trials and won trophies with younger brother, Robin, as navigator. By the time he entered Ormond College at Melbourne University to study medicine in 1952, he was skilled in electronics, mechanics, fine carving and cabinetry.

After graduating in 1957, he specialised in surgery and in 1963 gained fellowship of The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. In many respects his next degree, master of surgery at Melbourne University in 1964, defined him. At that time, it was a research degree of high quality and throughout his life he practised research-based medicine or surgery, long before it became a trendy catchphrase.

An extraordinary anatomist, he was appointed senior lecturer in anatomy at Melbourne University in 1962, and brought both a practicality and intense scientific interest to

his teaching. Former students will remember him with a freshly harvested brain in one hand and a pocketknife in the other, before proceeding to dissect the brain with extraordinary skill and dexterity.

His postgraduate training in Britain was under Joe Pennybacker at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, and Valentine Logue, at Queens Square and Maida Vale - at the time pre-eminent centres of neurosurgical training. He then took a most unusual pathway for an Australian surgeon, spending a year studying under Ross Adey at the Space Biology Laboratory, Brain Research Institute, at the University of California, Los Angeles, studying behaviour modification using electromagnetic radiation. Adey, the brilliant and eclectic neurophysiologist, was later known for his work on the CIA's infamous Pandora project.

Peter was deeply influenced by Adey's neurophysiological and electrophysiological studies. Throughout his life he was interested in consciousness, an interdisciplinary subject to which philosophers, psychologists and physiologists normally contribute. It was very unusual to have a surgeon publishing in this field.

Peter returned to Melbourne in 1967, and began a lifetime in neurosurgery, initially as an assistant at both the RMH and Prince Henry's; he was head of unit at Prince Henry's for 10 years from 1974 until 1984. And, while he remained a neurosurgeon at RMH, he was also a senior lecturer in the department of surgery at Melbourne University, where he remained vigorous and active until his death.

He was president of the Neurosurgical Society of Australasia in 1983 and '84, and chairman of the

Board of Neurosurgery from 1982 to 1985. For the last 10 years he also chaired the animal ethics committee at Melbourne University and the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research.

He continued to devour a broad range of scientific literature up to the time of his death. Each week he would present the neurosurgery library at the RMH with his annotated issues of the scientific journals, Science and Nature.

Peter brought the highest ethical, technical and academic standards to all his undertakings; he had a profound impact on the practice of neurosurgery throughout Australia and on the lives of countless patients.

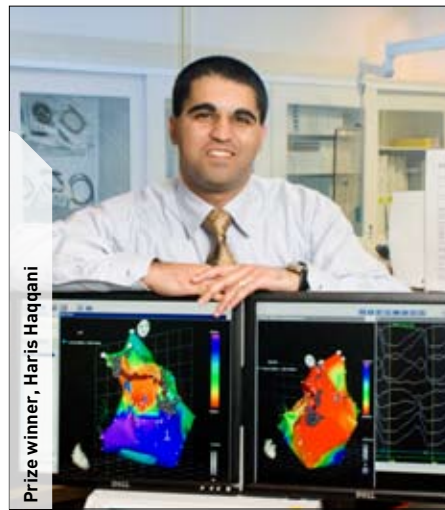
He is survived by his wife, Phillippa, whom he married in 1959, his daughters Susie and Liz, grandchildren Amelia, Lily, Gus, Hector and Harriet, his sister Adrienne, and brothers Richard and Michael. His brother, Robin, predeceased him.

Adrienne Clarke, laureate professor, school of botany, Melbourne University, is Peter Petty's sister; Andrew Kaye is professor of surgery, Melbourne University, and head of neurosurgery, RMH.

## Fellowship Awarded to Early Career Cancer Researcher

The Department of Surgery's Dr Rodney Luwor has won the Winter and Glover Post Doctoral Fellowship, giving the researcher three years of financial security to focus on cancer research.

Dr Luwor is studying therapeutic strategies in epithelial cancer.



## Cardiology Graduate Awarded for Outstanding Article

PhD graduate, Haris Haqqani who is now based in Philadelphia, USA has won the prestigious Parmley Prize for the most outstanding manuscript published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology by a young investigator. The published work originated from his studies at the University of Melbourne. The award will be presented at the American College of Cardiology ASM in March.

Haris completed his PhD about the types of potentially lethal heart rhythm disturbances that patients with heart failure can develop. His supervisors were Professor Jonathan M. Kalman and Dr Joseph B. Morton, fellows of the Department of Medicine, RMH/WH.

## Landmark Leukemia Study Published in Science

Children with leukemia may have more chance of making a full recovery from the disease with a breakthrough discovered by Fellow of the Department of Medicine Dr David Curtis and his colleague Dr Matthew McCormack.

Dr Curtis, Dr McCormack and their team have discovered cells that cause a common form of childhood leukemia unleashing hope that the discovery may lead to a treatment to prevent the cancer from recurring.

The researchers found that in mice, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and bone marrow transplants eradicated most of the leukemia cells but a small number of resistant cells survived. In 25 percent of cases, these surviving cells regrew the cancer.

With the identification of the problem cells, Dr Curtis and Dr McCormack will now study them and work out how they are resistant to normal chemotherapy and radiation. They hope to find a way to kill the problem cells, making treatment for leukemia more reliable and preventing remissions.

The study relating to this discovery has been published in Science.