

DR PETER ROBIN MACNEIL

Citation for the conferral of a Doctor of Health Studies (*honoris causa*)

Peter Robin Macneil was born on 6 July 1929 at Kew in Melbourne. His early schooling was at Scotch College and in 1948 he entered medical school in Melbourne graduating in 1953 with the degrees, Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery. Following an appointment at the Alfred Hospital he pursued his surgical training in New York and in the United Kingdom and qualified for his Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons. He returned to the Alfred Hospital as senior surgical registrar in 1962 and in that year qualified as a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

In 1964, Dr Macneil and his wife Kate moved to Wagga Wagga where he has practised as a surgeon for more than three decades. In that time, they raised four children all of whom have gone to university including one who is a graduate of Charles Sturt University.

Upon moving to Wagga Wagga, Dr Macneil immediately involved himself in the activities of the Hospital and the local community. In 1965, he became chairman of the Murrumbidgee Air Ambulance Committee to lobby for the establishment of a New South Wales Air Ambulance Service. He was also active as chairman of several hospital and medical committees in the region.

Very quickly, Dr Macneil established a reputation as one of the leading surgeons in rural and regional Australia. In October 1996, the Council of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons awarded Dr Macneil the College Medal in recognition of his contribution to the College and, in particular, to his initiatives in rural surgical services.

As further evidence of his commitment to rural medicine, he became a founding member of the Provincial Surgeons Association and was its President in 1969. He was elected to the New South Wales State Committee of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and in 1989 he became the first surgeon from outside a metropolitan area to be elected to the Council of the College.

Dr Macneil has been influential in the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in establishing recognition of rural surgery. He subsequently became the founding Chairman of the College's Divisional Group of Rural Surgery and in this role he was involved in promoting surgical training for general practitioners, especially those who practised in regional and rural areas of Australia. In later years, he was the convenor and first chairman of the College's Committees for Aboriginal Surgical Care and for Farm Injury Management.

During his career as a surgeon, Dr Macneil has always been keen to develop his skills and knowledge for the benefit of his patients in the rural communities in which he practised. For instance, in 1976 he spent four months at a major teaching hospital in Denmark as a visiting surgeon. Dr Macneil also has had a human commitment. In 1972, he had a two month teaching post in Sumatra, Indonesia where he was able to in himself in training local doctors and surgeons. He was also a senior surgeon at the RAAF Base at Butte in Malaysia for several months in 1976.

Dr Peter Macneil has always had a passion for improving medical education, particularly for those who practised in what he called "the bush". During the 1980s, he became Chairman of the Southern District Medical Association and was responsible for organising a number of

seminars. As a member of the Federal Council of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Dr Macneil became a member of the Committee of the Division of Continuing Medical Education and, again in this capacity, raised the level of understanding about the ongoing educational needs of those who practised in “the bush”. Not content with simply influencing his fellow surgeons, Dr Macneil became involved, in a very constructive and instrumental way, in a number of health and policy forums. For instance, he was a key member of the Rural Health Working Party of the New South Wales Hospital Association. He has attended and presented papers at many rural health conferences giving a keynote address at the 1992 National Rural Health Conference on “The Distribution and Provision of Surgical Services in Rural Australia.” In 1994, he was the convenor and organiser of the National Farm Injury Conference held at Charles Sturt University.

More recently he has advocated for, and achieved, Associate Teaching Hospital status for the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital with the Medical School of the University of New South Wales. He continues to deliver regular guest lectures to medical students at this University and takes an active interest in medical students involved in clinical rotations at the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital.

Dr Macneil also took responsibility for establishing the Riverina Rural Health Training Unit and became its foundation Medical Director. The purpose of the Unit was to provide continuing professional education for doctors and allied health professionals in the Riverina and Murray health districts. After three years of operation, this Unit was recently evaluated with the final report noting the significant contribution made by Dr Macneil to the Unit’s success. It is now acknowledged that the Unit is the most successful of its type in New South Wales providing medical students, doctors and health professionals with access to ongoing educational and training opportunities.

Dr Macneil has also had a significant role to play in the development of higher education in the Riverina. In 1974 he joined the Council of the Riverina College of Advanced Education and held a number of important positions including Deputy Chairman of Council from 1977 to 1983.

There is little doubt that Dr Peter Macneil has not only heightened the profile and importance of rural health in Australia, but he has given back to his profession and to regional and rural Australia the benefits of his education, knowledge and skills. Even in semi-retirement, he continues to pursue his interests in medical education and in rural and Aboriginal health issues and takes every opportunity to be an advocate for better health services for rural Australia. Dr Macneil has never sought laurels nor acknowledgement for what he has done or achieved which is testimony to his character and professionalism. Indeed, he humbly and publicly admits that the support of his wife, Kate, their family and the happy life they have had together have been his most valued achievements and have been the key ingredients to his career and any contribution he may have made.

Dr Peter Macneil is a doyen of the field of rural health, a respected and honoured surgeon in Australia, and a man on whom Charles Sturt University is proud to confer the award, Doctor of Health Studies (*honoris causa*).

Dated this Twenty Fourth Day of April One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety Seven