

[AFOEM Fellows interview series](#)

This series provides insight into the careers of retired and actively serving physicians in occupational medicine. I am very privileged and extremely humbled to continue to meet inspiring colleagues. On this occasion I had the pleasure of talking to Dr Judy Balint

Dr Farhan Shahzad, Consultant Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Sydney

Farhan: Welcome Judy & thank you for agreeing to join us for a discussion that looks into the early days of your career, your training & how your interest in occupational medicine developed.

Judy: I'm originally from Sydney and went to the University of NSW. After residency at POWH, I worked at Sydney Hospital which is where I became interested in Occupational Medicine.

In 1986, while working in a medical outpatients clinic, I was called to a metabolic emergency. The "emergency" was to allow clinicians to have a quick break and a cup of tea. Over the tea, I met Gavin Frost who was doing an occupational medicine clinic. Gavin spoke enthusiastically about Occ Med which whetted my enthusiasm and he recommended that I talk to his friend, Ian Gardner.

I completed the 10-week course in Occupational Medicine at WorkSafe Australia and undertook locums for the Coal Board, Electricity Commission and in private Occupational Health practices before joining Garden Island Dockyard (GID). The dockyard had a civilian workforce of several thousand tradespeople, ranging from shipwrights to boiler makers. Everyone who studied occupational medicine in NSW at that time did a workplace visit at GID.

While at GID, I completed a Master of Safety Science at UNSW and my Fellowship in Occupational Medicine, under the supervision of Dwight Dowda. After seven years at GID, I joined Optus Vision in a non-clinical role as National Health and Safety Manager. In 1997, I moved to Melbourne with Royal Dutch Shell and in 2001 was appointed as health adviser on the Sakhalin oil and gas project in the Russian Far East. I worked on the health impact assessment for the project and the report was included on the WHO website as an example of HIA for a major project.

I did further international posts with Shell: in Brazil, as Latin America Regional Health Manager and in Dubai as Regional Health Manager for the Middle East and Commonwealth of Independent States. At Shell, the management of health risks was a key part of an integrated HSE management system. I have been extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to work in many different countries with interesting and wonderful people.

Farhan: What message do you have for our Fellows & trainees?

Judy: We need to recognize and create opportunities and maintain our curiosity so that collectively we anticipate workplace needs.

I think we need to get closer to industry bodies and the regulators and better understand the workplace issues so we are recognized as valued advisers to businesses. Skill mix is critical. We need to balance clinical expertise with advocacy and understanding of business drivers. The capacity to present a coherent argument in both written and oral form is essential. The Occupational and Environmental Physicians of the future will need to demonstrate how they add value to business and have a breadth of skills which supports individuals as well as businesses.