

## 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 Chris Oates.

**Farhan: Hi Chris, Let's talk about your achievements, memories & highlights of your career.**

**Chris:** I served in various roles with ANZSOM at a time before there was close cooperation with AFOEM, first in various posts in the NSW branch and then as Treasurer General of the National ANZSOM body for six years through a period of transition towards a professional secretariat, which has turned ANZSOM into a slick and professional organisation that it is today.

My special interests have switched from an earlier interest in aviation medicine, then taking up work with the WCC (Workers Compensation Commission) and the Medical Assessment Service of Motor Accidents Authority to begin work in dispute assessment for Whole Person Impairment and treatment disputes. As I gained experience, I became increasingly comfortable in navigating these often complex cases. I particularly have enjoyed my last 15 years as a Medical Review Panel member, interacting collegially with two other medical specialists to achieve a decision which can be accepted by both parties to a dispute. I have also enjoyed providing a regional centre day clinic consultancy service in several NSWs centers over a 20-year period.

**Farhan: Where to here from now?**

**Chris:** I moved back from Sydney after 30 years to Gold Coast in 2013 ostensibly to semi-retire but I maintained twice-monthly visits to Sydney to consult and have progressively reduced my visits to country centres. This continued until the onset of COVID in March 2020 and since that time, I have cultivated new skills in telehealth assessments. I found these challenging at first but like anything, as one's experience grows, one learns more work-arounds to deal with this new way of doing things. I suspect that after we come through COVID it is likely that telehealth assessments will remain as they are particularly valuable for people in regional and remote areas.

**Farhan: Do you have a message for Trainees and Fellow Occupational Physicians?**

**Chris:** Doctors in general and occupational physicians in particular, have such a wide field of practice to choose from. I believe starting in a general practice to get a good basic ground with patients and their work circumstances or, alternatively, working in a clinic where work-related injuries are treated with a component of assessment in the field is the best type of training. Once you identify your niche, you should go after it and if it proves elusive, for whatever reason, there will always be a rewarding compromise position somewhere out there.