

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 Ian Gardner (Past president, 1996-1998 and 2000-2002).

Dr Farhan Shahzad, Consultant Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Sydney

***Farhan:* Welcome Ian! Please tell us a little about your personal life, early training and how you developed an interest in Occupational and Environmental Medicine?**

Ian Gardner: I am a Queenslander who graduated in 1975 in Medicine from the University of Queensland, and then worked for three years as Medical Superintendent with the right of private practice at Clermont in Central Queensland.

In 1980, I received an offer from Alcoa of Australia to be their inaugural medical officer with the world's biggest alumina refinery at Pinjarra, WA. I soon realized that I needed some formal postgraduate training in Occupational Health!

So, I enrolled parttime in biostatistics and epidemiology at the WA Institute of Technology, now known as Curtin University. ALCOA had promised to send me to the University of Dundee in 1982 for what was then the world's best short course in Occupational Medicine. Unfortunately, the world alumina market crashed in late 1981 so that opportunity was no longer on the table. I made an on the spot decision to resign. I applied to PROF David Ferguson for an admission to the Master of Public Health degree at Sydney Uni in '82 and received a partial credit for the academic work I had done with WAIT.

A few months after commencing the MPH course in Sydney, I was offered a position as Medical Officer for ICI Australia in Sydney. ICI agreed to allow me to complete my MPH studies (fully paid). At the time, ICI was one of the southern hemisphere's biggest manufacturing companies with products encompassing petrochemicals, fertilisers, explosives, pesticides, animal and human medicines, paints, fibres, plastics, solvents and chlorine. My four years with ICI Australia gave me very comprehensive training in occupational health. My MPH thesis was based on Lead work at DULUX, an ICI subsidiary.

In late 1985, I was head hunted for a brand-new position as Managing Physician with IBM Australia. This was during a time when the RSI epidemic was running rampant and the IBM Corporation was desperately worried. After a 5-month training and development assignment in Japan, I was subsequently offered the Senior Managing Physician role with IBM Asia Pacific in Tokyo. We moved back to Japan, and for nearly 4 years I was responsible for the health, safety, medical and

environment for IBM in the entire Asia Pacific. It included 19 countries, 50,000 employees and around 1500 expatriates.

I returned to Australia in 1991 and resumed my very strong involvement in the American College of OEM as well as the old Australasian College of Occupational Medicine (ACOM).

After leaving IBM in 1998, I went into a full-time consulting practice which included pro bono work for the Workers Health Centre, a trade union affiliated medical centre in Western Sydney. It gave me credibility with the Unions and the Labor party which was of enormous assistance in my later appointments to many Government roles as I was able to show a 'balanced professional practice'.

Between 2001 and 2015, I worked for the Department of Defence as Senior Consultant in OEM. An extraordinary job!

In 2015, I was offered the position of Chief Health Officer and Principal Medical Adviser with the Department of Veterans Affairs in Canberra. I knew the DVA system intimately because of my long involvement with Defence. I remained in this role until mid-2019 when I decided to semi retire and move back to Queensland.

***Farhan:* That's so interesting Ian, what is keeping you busy these days?**

Ian Gardner: In the last 20 years, I've done massively more work in the environmental space than occupational -- yet find them both interesting. I'm currently doing a large amount of consulting work in the COVID-19 space.

I've been particularly interested in an emerging area of critical occupational health importance which is that of engineered nanomaterials. Managed to get a short article published in *Nature Nanotechnology*.

***Farhan:* What's your message for trainees and fellow colleagues?**

Ian Gardner: This is my 40th year in occupational medicine. The best career advice I received came from the IBM chairman, John Akers. He told me that my main job was to do two things. They were '***do what's right***' and '***keep us out of trouble***'. If you stick to that, everything else falls into place!