

AFOEM Fellows interview series

This series provides insight into the careers of retired and actively serving physicians in occupational medicine. On this occasion I had the pleasure and privilege to meet with Dr Robin Chase.

Farhan: Thanks for joining us, Robin. Please tell us about yourself, your life training & how you developed an interest in occupational medicine.

Robin: I was born in England in 1955 and my parents came across to Australia when I was 2 years old. I grew up in a housing commission estate, north-west of Adelaide. My father died when I was 10 and my mother worked in a car wrecking yard whilst I was in high school. In the very first year Gough Whitlam brought in free university, so I got into the Adelaide Medical School in 1974. When I was in my 3rd year, I joined the Navy. They paid me a wage as a midshipman from the 4th - 6th year then paid me the salary of a sublieutenant in my intern year. I went into the Navy in 1981 for 5 years. It was in the Navy that I developed an interest in occupational medicine. In those days, the Navy was largely just exercising so most of the injuries we had in the sailors were sporting injuries & motorbike accidents.

Whilst at sea, I served in a destroyer and travelled to Israel with a heavy landing craft taking equipment over to Israel & to collect people. I was Senior Medical Officer of Surgery on HMAS Penguin for a while. My interest in occupational medicine grew which moved me away from surgery. I decided that I didn't want to become a surgeon. Now, there's a very odd juxtaposition with that too because when I was Senior Medical Officer of Surgery, there was a hand surgeon named Don Faithful. He wrote a paper & coined the term "RSI" in the late 70s. Whilst I was in the Navy, I wrote a paper called, "Policies and Protocols for the Prevention of RSI" in the *Operators of the Royal Australian Navy Microcomputer Network* in 1981 or '82.

I left the Navy & did a year at Sydney Uni at the School of Public Health & Tropical Medicine. After that, I went into private practice in Bondi Junction. I worked at the Workers Health Centre which is a Trade Union organisation and also in the ED at St Vincent's Hospital to gain some experience in general medicine. There was a job at the Royal Adelaide Hospital for an occupational health registrar. Leon Le Lou was the director, and I became his sole registrar. I gained exposure to hospital occupational medicine including Hepatitis B immunisations, needle stick injuries and policies. Both Leon & I were on the Radiation Control Committee which covered various health facilities in Adelaide. Back injuries in nurses probably took up most of our time and it was there I found my interest in pain. I did some lecturing at the Elton Mayo School of Management which was part of Uni SA for 2 years. I then sat my exams & passed my fellowship. After 2 years, I moved back to Sydney & went into private practice for 3 or 4 years which was strictly a commercial organisation. I recruited some of the GPs who had an interest in seeing work injuries & wanted to go out & visit employers.

Farhan: You were given an Honorary fellowship at the Irish faculty & were President between 2010-2012. You were also Chair of the Faculty Policy Advocacy Committee; have an Order of Australia and I have had the pleasure of working with you in the Employment Poverty and Health Benefits Group. Where do you see the faculty moving onwards? Do you have a message for trainees and Fellows?

Robin: You've got to have some skills with treatment, in assessing workplaces and in negotiation. You've got to get out there and speak with employers and there's lots of different ways of doing that. It's not for the health of the faculty but for the health of the workers, their families, and the community. Don't take up the crusades that aren't going to work or that are going nowhere.

For trainees, registrars, and junior Fellows - get active with the faculty. My recommendation is get the experience, have a goal which will improve things and get involved with the faculty.