



This series provides insight into the careers of retired and actively serving occupational physicians. The interview series has supported a collaboration amongst our peers in developing projects on compiling the history of occupational medicine. On this occasion, I had the pleasure of meeting Dr Philippa Harvey-Sutton.

Dr Farhan Shahzad, Consultant Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Sydney

Farhan: Please tell us about yourself, your personal life/family, medical school, and training

Thank you, Farhan. I was fortunate to come from a medical family. My father, Dr Philip Rundle was a consultant physician and an industrial physician in the same cohort as Professor David Ferguson. My uncle, Professor Frank Rundle was a specialist surgeon and the Founding Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of New South Wales.

I graduated with First Class Honours in Medicine in 1975 from Sydney University and after my professorial residency year [at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and Orange Base Hospital,] I went into general practice.

In 1989, I attended the year-long course for the Degree of Master of Public Health in Occupational Health at Sydney University and Worksafe Australia and completed my treatise on "Work-Related Electrical Fatalities" in 1990. I became a Fellow of the Australasian College of Occupational Medicine in 1991 by examination. Over the years I continued doing courses including a Degree of Masters in Pain Medicine at Newcastle University in 2003.

Farhan: Please tell us how you developed an interest in Occupational & Environmental Medicine

When I was growing up, I was interested in visiting with my father industrial sites in Newcastle including the NSW State Dockyard and the Sulphide Works, a subsidiary of Consolidated Zinc Ltd. I was well aware of Newcastle being an industrial town.

Some many years later, 1983, I started, with a young family, doing occupational medical assessments working as a Commonwealth Medical Officer with the Department of Health which subsequently became the Australian Government Health Service and later Health Services Australia. The assessments ranged through pre-employment, fitness for duty, capacity to meet the standards for specific types of work and also specific environments such as the Antarctic through to retirement on medical grounds for workers in government, NGO's Non-government organizations and large corporates. In addition, I carried out medicals for Social Security – Invalid pension and subsequently Disability Support Pension – the question being, were the applicants fit to work or not? And similarly, the work for Immigration included the question, were the applicants fit to work or not?

In addition, in the 1980's, Repetition Strain Injury – RSI – became an "epidemic" within the Public Service and we ran RSI clinics as well doing workplace site visits.

Over the years my work evolved into progressing occupational rehabilitation through case review, stakeholder liaison and case management meetings with facilitation of mediations/negotiations in difficult or sensitive cases.

My work also diversified into developing national standards for health assessment as well as worksite specific vaccinations such as the Q Fever program and educational programs.

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

I had been working with Health Services Australia in a Consultant Occupational Physician role since 1994, when in 1999, I commenced private practice, in the name of my company Medical Independent Assessments, in rooms in Macquarie St Sydney. My practice diversified again in the private sector with independent medical assessments for injuries sustained in motor vehicle accidents as well as occupational injuries and facilitating mediations/negotiations in difficult or sensitive cases such as with healthcare staff, teachers, and Safety Critical Workers.

The work led to appointments with the Motor Accident Authority as a medical assessor and a Review Appeal Panel Member and similarly, appointments as a Workers Compensation Commission Authorised Medical Specialist for General Disputes and Permanent Impairment Assessments and as a Review Panel member. I continued to do so with the amalgamation of the two jurisdictions into the Personal Injury Commission in 2021.

On 30 September 2022, I retired!

As for memories, Oh, I have lots and so have joined the RACP History of Occupational Medicine Committee chaired by Professor Niki Ellis.

Highlights are many and include having my MPH treatise, "Work-related electrical fatalities in Australia, 1982-1984" published in the Scandinavian Journal Work Environment Health 1992; 18:293-7 with Dr Timothy Driscoll, Dr Michael Frommer and Dr James Harrison. Professor Ferguson had suggested to me that I analyze the electrical fatality subset of The Work-Related Fatalities Study commissioned by Bob Hawke as part of his Accord with the unions, employers, and the government, when he became prime minister.

Other of my highlights, include being Nominee member of the RACP to Standards Australia Committee – Human Factors, and a committee member on the RACP (AFOEM) Maintenance of Professional Standards.

A further highlight was being elected to the Committee of the Medico-Legal Society of NSW (for 22 years) where I was a committee member, medical secretary and in 2006-7, I was honored to be elected President. Subsequently I was elected to the Committee of the Australian Academy of Forensic Sciences (for 8 years)

Farhan: *What's your legacy?*

I re-read my treatise of 1990 and noted one of my conclusions that the *use of residual current devices (RCD) would probably have prevented deaths.*

I Googled and found – there was intense lobbying from industry to Standards Australia (AS) for installation of these devices. This was achieved in the AS 3000:1991 edition, of which there were seven amendments up to 1997) that allowed RCDs as additional protection. with the 2007 edition of the Wiring Rules, there was stipulation on RCD installations and since 2018, it is a mandatory requirement for all final sub-circuits to be protected by an RCD.

So, my treatise was a support to advance safety.

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

Occupational Medicine is a multi-stranded vocation, and I would agree with Dr Armand Casolin to keep your eyes out for opportunities. When I started my interest in Occupational Medicine, I could never have imagined the journey which I have taken.