



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 Roman Simson.

Dr Farhan Shahzad, Consultant Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Sydney

Farhan: Dr Simson, please provide us with an insight into your career and tell us a little bit about yourself and your training.

Roman: Sydney has been my life-long hometown. I attended Canterbury Boys High from 1949 to 1953 where chemistry, athletics and swimming were my main interests.

I graduated from UNSW in Chemical Engineering in 1959 and Applied Biology in 1961. I was accepted into the first student cohort in the new medical school at my alma mater, graduating in 1967. Early professional work included engineering design and development, analytical and research laboratory work in the chemical and food industries, as well as teaching at several TAFE colleges.

Some family health issues drew me towards medicine and my technical background seemed to blend well in leading me towards workplace health and safety, including environmental health concerns.

After my residencies, I gained a broad experience in the NSW Division of Occupational Health and came to appreciate team work with occupational health nurses and occupational hygienists. A brief interval in general practice followed before gaining a graduate DOH from Sydney University in 1975. I was privileged to hold a NHMRC Travelling Fellowship the following year, focussing whilst overseas on existing and emerging legislation, education, services to small employers, and hospital OHS. On my return, I took up the new position of Occupational Physician in the Department of Occupational and Staff Health at Royal North Shore Hospital. Then, in 1979, an interesting and valuable work experience presented itself as WHO Short-Term Consultant in OHS Education in Sri Lanka. Over the years, I have been involved in trainee mentoring and supervision, committee memberships and as an occasional examiner.

Since then, my private practise and hospital experiences have included consulting for a number of companies and government organisations for example foods; pharmaceuticals; household and aerosol products; pesticides; energy; printing; plastics, adhesives and abrasives; light and medium engineering; transport; and environmental management, along with reviews of the (then) NSW Workcover Medical Branch; as Chair of the Joint Advisory Committee on Safety and Health Policy of the (then) Australian Atomic Energy Commission; an external Masters' degree examiner; and as a Breath Analysis Scheme Police Educator and expert witness.

Farhan: What are some particular achievements and career highlights?

Roman: Among the most satisfying professional and personal experiences has been seeing all five of my Registrars/Colleagues from Royal North Shore Hospital's DOSH pass their Fellowship exit examinations on the first attempt, and to acknowledge the mutual learning that we experienced.

My long term interests have been in the areas of health assessment and surveillance - from recruitment through to retirement; contributing to progressing occupational rehabilitation, in particular through case review, stakeholder liaison and case management meetings; and facilitating mediations/negotiations in difficult or sensitive cases of alleged workplace exposure to chemicals and other agents and in risk assessment and management strategies; the future of work, as well as further developing, expanding and modelling the axiomatic reciprocal relationship between work and health.

As something of a dinosaur, having retired from practice in 2017, I have lived through key changes in perceptions, priorities, progress, and practises in our discipline. I see myself as having been a better “*doer*” than “*manager*” and still look back fondly to my Dinosaur’s Toolbox, fitted out for screening tests as a precursor to occupational hygiene referral: Drager Tubes and 3M Discs; Sound Level Meter; Light LUX Meter; Anemometer; Smoke Tubes; and, Video Recording of work tasks to help with ergonomic assessments.

Farhan: Is there anything else you would like to do in occupational medicine, and do you have a message for our trainees and Fellows?

Roman: I have been blessed with a loving and understanding wife for the past 62 years, three wonderful children, six grandsons and three great-grandsons at last count. To keep one alert to happenings in the world around us, I have a number of ongoing interests.

My advice to Trainees and, I’m sure, a shared reminder with Fellows, would be to visit as many workplaces as you can and remember that the ‘rhythm’ of jobs may mean that some tasks are performed less frequently and may underlie significant problems not readily observed.

Teamwork is critical as is the acknowledgement of the contributing member’s input.

Offer management a hierarchy of solution options indicating possible consequences of each. Don’t tell management what they can’t do, but rather what they can do. Practise with genuine transparency and integrity.

Acknowledge the high value of specialists who have developed an interest in OM/WHs, eg, from rheumatology, dermatology, ophthalmology, and respiratory medicine.

Find balance between the necessary elements of practise, research and teaching.

There will be a time to slow down. Plan for part-time work best suited to your capacity and competence at that time and have a colleague critique the practise.

Keep in touch with OHE&S outside your own particular interests, and with actual and potential new directions relating to products, work, employment, community expectations and government policy.