



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 Tim Steward.

Dr Farhan Shahzad, Consultant Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Sydney

Farhan: Welcome to our interview series, Dr Tim Steward. Kindly tell us a little about your personal and professional journey.

Tim: I'm originally from the North of Ireland. I graduated from Queen's University in Belfast and some years later, my wife and I emigrated to Australia. We settled in Portland (VIC) for 9 years which coincided with the introduction of Alcoa Aluminium Smelter to the country town. I became interested in what was then called "*industrial medicine*." I ran a clinic on the construction site which led to the specialty of occupational medicine. I completed a Master's in Occupational Health at Sydney University.

I had some experience with Sydney Water, prior to moving to Hobart with The Zinc Works in 1988. There were a lot of issues surrounding effluent discharge into the River Derwent as well as occupational exposure to lead, cadmium and mercury. I continued at The Zinc Works part-time and went into private practice where I have continued.

There was a crossover between occupational medicine and public health medicine. At the time, occupational medicine was relatively smaller than it is now as it morphed into Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

There are currently so many environmental issues. There is a real opportunity to move away from what currently exists, which is often an important medicolegal, return to work scenario; but also recognise the environmental opportunities that are so prevalent. The opportunity for occupational medicine to contribute more has never been greater.

Farhan: Let's talk about your achievements, memories & highlights of your career, especially occupational medicine in Tasmania?

Tim: I remember in the late 1980's/early 1990, the general manager at The Zinc Works said that if the company's profits and losses continued the way they were going, there would be no Plant in Tasmania within 5 years. The Zinc Works is still there and in production of high-quality zinc. It is a tremendous compliment to many different people in Tasmania, not least of which has been the medical community in fostering a good relationship with the Plant.

It is highly likely that Zinc Works will go through a modernisation scheme in the future which the Federal and State Governments have encouraged. This will mean that much of the current antiquated work practices will be engineered out with the construction of a new electrolytic cell room. The Hobart community is in favour of continuing Zinc Works but wants a plant upgrade commensurate with a modern environment.

Farhan: Where to here from now?

Tim: I'm transitioning to retirement. I'm involved in dementia studies and organising two conferences with ANZSOM which I really enjoy.

I see the model that the College of Physicians has where there are societies associated with specialties (e.g. the cardiac society with Cardiology) and I am delighted to note that ANZSOM is now formally associated with the Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

The society's meetings promote Occ Med to Specialists, General practitioners and Nurses who already have an interest. But formal education to become a specialist remains totally with the Royal Australasian College of Physicians.

Farhan: Where do you see the future of our faculty and what would you like to do if you have more opportunity?

Tim: We are missing out on:

1. the environmental opportunities. It's too comfortable to be in the medico-legal field.
2. We need to lead the debate to actively explore the opportunities that exist. (Look at the silicon and silicosis debate where history is repeating itself)
3. We need to have more confidence in our own expertise. The public needs to be educated in recognising that occupational and environmental physicians are the people who can help bring people together and create better health outcomes in Australia.
4. The biggest environmental challenge is climate change. Are we involved and offering solutions and advice? Not yet!
5. General recognition of good hygiene, aeration and ventilation was vital in management of the COVID outbreak and we could have played a bigger part.
6. Prospectively, we are the most important specialty as we know how to visit and evaluate a workplace.

Farhan: What message do you have for Fellows and trainees of our faculty?

Tim: I think that it behoves the fellows and trainees to actively debate and look at the big picture asking of ourselves and colleagues:

"What can I be doing within this area that is going to add better value prospectively?"

Stop pulling the punches and provide leadership!