



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 Prof Niki Ellis, Inaugural President AFOEM 1992-94.

Dr Farhan Shahzad, Consultant Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Sydney

Prof Ellis: I turned 65 this year. I don't think of myself as transitioning to retirement but in reality, I suppose I am. I sit on boards in the fields of workplace mental health, responsible drinking, evidence and implementation science and higher education, and am still the Work for Health advisor for Comcare. All of which I enjoy.

I was brought up in Launceston, in a museum. It taught me the importance of history, which I bring to my work as an occupational and public health physician. I am not from a medical family, but my Father was very interested in medicine and encouraged me, <https://www.theadvocate.com.au/story/2899981/arts-identity-dies-in-fire/>. Later he helped me with research and editing for my book, *Work and Health: Management in Australia and New Zealand*, published by Oxford University Press in 2001.

Farhan: Let's talk about your achievements, memories and the many highlights of your career.

Prof Ellis: I did my degree in Tasmania and then went to work at the Royal Hobart Hospital. I was accepted into the Basic Physician Training program, but wasn't enjoying clinical work. Never could I have imagined then I would end up being a Director on the RACP board for two years 2018-2020. Serendipitously in 1980 my consultant for a term in oncology was Allan Foster, a former Minister for Health, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/foster-allan-john-12506>. He could see I was unhappy and suggested public health. He picked up the phone and rang the Director of Public Health at the time. "I want you to give this young girlie a job", he said, and so my career began.

My career has taken me through the State and Commonwealth public service, to the private sector with my own consultancy with offices in Sydney, Melbourne and, for a while, Brisbane. I sold it to PricewaterhouseCoopers and worked with them, before going to London and working at London Southbank University and the Department of Health on health services innovation, and the Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine. I came back to Australia to an academic career setting up the Centre for Military and Veterans' Health at the University of Queensland and then the Institute for Safety and Recovery Research at Monash. A highlight in 2007 was making the television series *Stressbuster* <https://www.abc.net.au/tv/stressbuster/>.

Until recently all my mentors have been men – Helen McArdle's father was my first boss, Martin Bicevskis was a knowledgeable and kind peer in those early years, Peter Brooks and Steve Leeder demonstrated the power of advocacy AND research. There wasn't a well-established career pathway, I followed my nose.

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

Prof Ellis: My advice to younger occupational physicians would be the emerging landscape of the integrated approach to WHS is opening up horizons for us. Don't wait to be asked, create new roles for our profession.