

The Early History of Rehabilitation Medicine in Queensland

Introduction

For a number of years, I have been trying to get around to putting on paper the early history of the specialty of Rehabilitation Medicine and the work of Queensland Fellows of the AFRM (and ACRM before it) in developing rehabilitation services in Queensland. This was initially prompted because while there was some information on the history of rehabilitation medicine for most other states, there was a distinct lack of information regarding Queensland. The document that I ended up with was much more detailed than I originally envisaged.

Please note that the following information has been gleaned and collated from a wide variety of disparate sources including personal communications with Fellows who provided me with information. I have done my best to ensure that it is accurate but I apologise in advance for any errors or omissions. I am happy to receive and incorporate additional information or make corrections from any sources. This document covers the period up to ~ 2005.

Rehabilitation medicine as a specialty was slower to develop in Queensland than in some other states although rehabilitation and related services were being developed as early as the late 1950's.

The first geriatric unit had been established at Princess Alexandra Hospital (PAH) by 1961 and at The Prince Charles Hospital (TPCH) by 1966-7.

Dr Paul Hopkins returned to Australia in 1964 having obtained his RACS in the UK in 1963 however illness changed his career direction significantly. His first rehabilitation appointment was as Rehabilitation Medical Officer at Rosemount Repatriation Rehabilitation Hospital in Brisbane. The following year he commenced at the Repatriation Artificial Limb and Appliance Centre where he continued until 1969 when appointed Medical Director, Kingsholme the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service Centre at Taringa.

Male and female head injury wards for first being developed in the late 60's and early 70's as part of chronic and geriatric services at PAH. Geriatricians Dr Keith Hirschfield and Dr Glenda Powell were prominent in the early days of geriatric and brain injury rehabilitation services at PAH. There was also close co-operation with Paul Hopkins at the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service.

Dr Frank Johnson returned from training in Rheumatology and Rehabilitation in the UK and at Ranch Los Amigos in California in 1969 and established a Rheumatology and Rehabilitation Unit at Royal Brisbane Hospital (RBH). In 1977, he established the Queensland group of the Australian Association of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (AAPM&R). He later set up the Rehabilitation Units at both the public hospital at the Gold Coast and at Allamanda Private Hospital.

Organised care for people with spinal cord injuries (SCI) first commenced at PAH around 1962 but the Spinal Injuries Unit as it exists today, started with the appointment of Dr Bill Davies as Director in 1972. Bill had recently received his RACP but had not had thoughts of

Rehabilitation Medicine until a family member suffered a spinal cord injury. He began a mission to improve medical care for people with SCI in Brisbane and he travelled to Perth and later to Stoke Mandeville. With encouragement from his mentor, Sir George Bedbrook he was inspired to return to PAH and overhaul the Spinal Injuries Unit.

Dr Vernon Hill first worked on the Spinal Ward at PAH in 1965 as a physiotherapist and after completing his medical degree returned in 1975 as a Senior Medical Officer.

Neurosurgeon, Dr Leigh Atkinson returned to Brisbane in January 1970 from Edinburgh where he had been involved in the rehabilitation of spinal injury for the three years previously. He started working at the Cerebral Palsy Unit in New Farm in Brisbane and weekly multidisciplinary meetings were commenced. In 1970 he co-founded the multi-disciplinary pain service at the PAH. He was founding chair of the Department of Neurosurgery at PAH in 1974 and by the mid-70s he had commenced a multi-disciplinary service for children with spina bifida. He also worked with both Paul Hopkins at CRS at Taringa and Keith Hirshfield at the PAH Head Injury Unit.

Other prominent surgeons involved in chronic pain management and rehabilitation in Brisbane were Dr Bill Ryan (Orthopaedic Surgery) and Dr Ivan Yaschich (Neurosurgery), who established back pain and spinal rehabilitation services at Belmont Private Hospital and then later at the Wesley Private Hospital.

By 1980, Paul Hopkins had been appointed Director, Rehabilitation Services: State Health Department. This role involved directing hospital based rehabilitation programs including Head Injury Unit (Princess Alexandra Hospital), Adult and Children's Amputee Clinics at 4 different centres including Rockhampton and Maryborough Base Hospitals and the Rehabilitation Engineering Clinic at the Royal Children's Hospital. He was also involved in planning rehabilitation services in the community and in all aspects of Health Department services for people with physical disabilities including policy formulation and operational aspects of the Home Medical Aids Scheme.

At the time of the incorporation of the Australian College of Rehabilitation Medicine in August 1979 there were 8 Founder Fellows from Queensland including Dr's Leigh Atkinson, Bill Davies, Keith Hirschfield, Paul Hopkins and Frank Johnson. Dr Ivan Yaksich was also a founding fellow based in Darwin at the time.

By 1980, Bill Davies had been made Chairman of the Ministerial State Planning Committee for the International Year of the Disabled, and as a result many things improved for people with a disability in Queensland. As a consequence, he was awarded the Honour of Member of the General Division of the Order of Australia for Service to Medicine.

The Geriatric Assessment and Rehabilitation Unit opened at TPCH in 1981 with Dr Barry Smithurst as Director. Around the same time Glenda Powell became Director of the new Geriatric and Rehabilitation Unit at Ipswich Hospital and also subsequently of the Rehabilitation Unit at the Repatriation General Hospital Greenslopes from 1986 to 2001. She became a Fellow of the AFRM in 1988.

Bill Davies and Vernon Hill were both instrumental in the development of a purpose-built Spinal Injuries Unit at PAH finally completed in 1985. Dr Hill took over as Director over the unit in 1987. He received the College Medal in 2009.

In 1989, the Head Injury Unit was transferred to the new purpose-built Geriatric and Rehabilitation Unit (GARU) at PAH. Dr Chris Davis was appointed Director at GARU at The Prince Charles Hospital in 1992.

In 1992, Paul Hopkins was appointed full time Director of Rehabilitation at Princess Alexandra Hospital with responsibilities as Director of the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit and for amputee services in Queensland. He was also Director/Advisor to the Holy Spirit Private Hospital Rehabilitation Service. His appointment to the RBH Amputee Clinic also introduced Rehabilitation Medicine as an essential component of the Multidisciplinary Pain Centre at RBH. Dr Hopkins received the Order of Australia for services to rehabilitation and community especially for children with physical disabilities in 2000 and the Faculty Medal in 2003. Dr Ron Hazelton was appointed Director of BIRU in 1998 on Dr Hopkins retirement.

Others notable in rehabilitation services throughout the 80's and 90's, which were or later became Fellows of the Faculty include: John Wicks (cardiology and cardiac rehabilitation), Dr Sue Urquhart (spinal cord injury), Kathryn Pugh (spinal cord and brain injury rehabilitation) and Kong Goh (general rehabilitation).

With regard to AFRM Queensland Branch matters, Dr Paul Hopkins was either Chair or Secretary of the Queensland State Branch from 1981 – 1995. Dr Vernon Hill took over as Chair in the mid-1990's and Dr Ron Hazelton was secretary for many years in the late 90's and early 2000's.

Dr Tim Geraghty returned to Brisbane to take over from Vernon Hill as Director of the SIU in 1999 after completing the AFRM training program in Sydney. He was keen to re-invigorate the Queensland Branch and took over as Branch Chair in early 2000. A Rehabilitation Medicine Workforce Planning Sub-Committee was established and liaison commenced with Queensland Health to promote Rehabilitation Medicine and the needs for new consultant and registrar positions and new services in general including representation on the Medical Workforce Advisory Committee – Queensland.

Queensland Branch fellows participated on the Rehabilitation Advisory Panel to develop a State-wide Plan for Rehabilitation Services in Queensland: 2000-2005. The Plan was completed late in 1999 but never implemented.

The Branch Training Program was also more formally established including regular fortnightly didactic teaching and Saturday morning clinical sessions that rotated through all hospitals with training positions.

From a Paediatric Rehabilitation Medicine perspective, Dr Karen Shephard was Director of the Paediatric Rehabilitation Service at Royal Brisbane Hospital for many years but resigned in 1999 to take up a position in the USA. Dr Lynne McKinlay took over the Statewide Paediatric Rehabilitation Service (SPRS) and received her Fellowship in Paediatric Rehabilitation Medicine in 2001. Dr Priya Edwards also received her Fellowship in 2001 and commenced at the SPRS.

Dr Wilbur Chan was the first advanced trainee to complete the full adult Rehabilitation Medicine training program in Queensland which he commenced in 1996 and successfully completed the Fellowship exam and received his Fellowship in 1999. Unfortunately, there were no consultant positions available in Queensland at the time and he went south to work in Wollongong for a number of years. In 2001, funding was announced for the establishment

of a new Rehabilitation Physician position at The Prince Charles Hospital in Brisbane. Dr Wilbur Chan was the successful applicant for this position and commenced in 2002.

Dr Saul Geffen also returned to Queensland from training in Sydney in 2001 and established the first new private practice in Rehabilitation Medicine in Queensland for many years.

Queensland had three registrars undertaking training in 2000, one paediatric Rehabilitation Medicine trainee and 2 adult Rehabilitation Medicine trainees. Only the paediatric rehabilitation service, the SIU and the BIRU were accredited for training in Rehabilitation Medicine.

With the help of Dr Jill Collins, the first new rehabilitation medicine training position in Queensland was established at St Vincent's Hospital, Robina on the Gold Coast and commenced in early 2002. This was a very important development as it was the first training position with a general rehabilitation medicine case mix and was vital to the development of the training program in Queensland as previously this aspect of training had to be undertaken in geriatric and rehabilitation units usually under the supervision of geriatricians.

The 10th Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) of the AFRM entitled "Rehabilitation: A Global Perspective" was held in Brisbane from the 7-10th May, 2002 and was the first ASM ever held in Queensland. It was generally considered to be very successful.

By 2002, the Rehabilitation Medicines services at Townsville Hospital had begun to expand under the leadership of Dr Paul Goldstraw including the development of a dedicated spinal rehabilitation service for North Queensland.

In 2001, the AFRM was represented for the first time at the Career Expo held each year and the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital and in 2003, the Queensland Branch was represented at a Careers Expo held by the NSW Branch.

Two new registrar training positions (general rehabilitation) commenced in 2003 – at The Prince Charles Hospital (under Dr Wilbur Chan) and at Mt Olivet Private Hospital (Dr Saul Geffen) and were accredited for training by the AFRM being the total to 5 accredited training positions in Queensland for 2003. The first group of trainees in Queensland included David Douglas, Kathryn Pugh, Mark Tadros, Cassandra McLennan and Michael Johnson.

In 2003, Dr David Douglas became the first trainee in Queensland to successfully complete training in Queensland since the establishment of the new Queensland Branch training program.

There was slow but steady growth in the public and private Rehabilitation Medicine sectors during this period including: Kong Goh taking over at Robina, John Wicks at Allamanda Private Hospital and Martin Dunlop in Cairns Base Hospital – all in 2003: David Douglas at Ipswich Hospital (2004) and Gerrit Fialla at Caloundra Hospital and Peninsula Private Hospital in 2005.

By 2005, the Queensland Branch training program had commenced a video-conferencing link with Epworth Hospital in Melbourne which greatly enhanced the training program and by 2006 new training positions at Ipswich, Caloundra and a second position in the SIU brought the total number to eight.

At the time of preparation of this report, there were 68 active Fellows of the AFRM in Queensland (compared to ~20 in 1999) and 38 trainees (compared to 2 in 1999).

While rehabilitation medicine services were slower to develop in Queensland, they have taken a very encouraging trajectory over the past 10-15 years.

**Prepared by Dr Tim Geraghty
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As at 1 September 2015

