

## **INTRODUCTION**

Rehabilitation Medicine in Australia owes its development to a small group who over the years established clinics, brought an academic discipline to the subject, were associated with the establishment of an Australian academic qualification and then set about creating an organisation which would ensure the recognition of the discipline and which would protect the standard that was practised and the status of its practitioners.

Today that organisation is the Australasian Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine (AFRM). As a Faculty of the **Royal Australasian College of Physicians** the AFRM is the peak professional organisation for Rehabilitation Medicine education and training in Australia and New Zealand.

In his address delivered at the convocation ceremony for the Australasian College of Rehabilitation Medicine (ACRM) held in conjunction with the 8th ASM of the ACRM in Brisbane in June 1988, Selwyn Nelson recollects the following about the development of the specialty of Rehabilitation Medicine in Australia:

*“My earliest recollections of rehabilitation concern the efforts of physiotherapists to improve the status of victims of poliomyelitis by a combination of patient exercises and orthopaedic surgical procedures such as tendon transplantation and triple arthrodesis of the tarsus. Sister Kenny a Queensland nurse was a controversial figure who had a special theory about muscle spasm. She gained a great deal of support in the USA due to her energetic, even if mistaken, promotion of her ideas.*

*Specialists in Physical Medicine were early exponents of the management of long term physical disabilities by massage, heat and manipulation. They provided the professional backing for the physiotherapists in clinical practice. The names of Leigh Wedlick, Frank May and Burton Wade come to mind as holders of appointments to teaching hospitals in capital cities.”*

*“Looking back over the years it is interesting to note the evolution of the specialty with the involvement of social workers, occupational therapists, psychologists, vocational advisors, educationists, speech pathologists and bio-engineers and collaborators with the various interests of rehabilitation specialists in the management of the disabled.”*