**OBITUARY**

**DR TREVOR PICKERING OAM, MBBS (Adel), FRCS (UK), FRACS, FAMA**

**GENERAL SURGEON  
30 APRIL 1934 – 29 JULY 2021**

Dr Trevor Pickering earned many accolades over his career, as an OAM for services to medicine, an eminent surgeon, a member of Australia’s first successful renal transplant team, and president of the AMA(SA) and Federal AMA.

Yet it was the Gold Medal of the AMA – having instigated the Cotton Report on Constitutional Reform and stabilised the association in a time of turmoil - that he valued most highly as true recognition by his peers for what he had achieved for the profession.

The AMA letter of conferral read in part: *As an executive officer of Federal Council, he made major contributions to the profession in the fields of quality assurance, medical benefits negotiations, care of the aged, and ethics. As President, he led the Association successfully through a long and difficult period of restructuring from which emerged a stronger, more representative, and more effective Association.* As Dr Peter Joseph observed at Dr Pickering’s memorial: ‘In the past, any AMA President who achieved much less would have been knighted but that was not the flavour of the day’.

Dr Pickering held many positions, including the last medical President of the Council of the Physiotherapy Association in South Australia, Vice-President and President of the AMA(SA), and Treasurer, Vice-President and President of the Federal AMA – the only South Australian to have achieved the double presidencies. He was a stabilising force in a combative period of medical politics following the introduction of Medicare in 1975, advocating for measures to maintain high standards of care.

Dr Pickering recalled it as a steep learning curve about people management, leadership, politics and the media but quickly established a reputation for improving systems and enabling and connecting people.

Under Dr Pickering’s auspices, the AMA progressed the financial security of doctors who often neglected this aspect of their lives and were often poorly prepared for ill health or retirement. This led to changes in the Medical Practitioners Act to allow incorporation of Medical Practices.

Dr Pickering served as Chairman of the Peer Review Resource Centre which established peer review and Quality Assurance in Australia and was on the executive of the Australian Council on Hospital Standards. He served on the Medical Benefits Schedule Revision Committee and made significant contributions to aged care. In 1990, he chaired the AMA (SA) Working Party on Euthanasia which took the first steps towards accepting euthanasia for patients with terminal illness.

In his public and private life, says his daughter Cheryl, he practiced the art of ‘careful and respectful negotiation, making all stakeholders feel heard and seen’. He also gathered insight into the appropriate and effective use of power, observing:

*Generally, if the possession of power does matter to an individual then maybe that person should not have power vested in them. Some people have to accept power and authority but they must be chosen carefully. An organisation will function properly if power is distributed wisely and tempered with wisdom, justice and compassion.*

As Cheryl recalls, Dr Pickering lived his life by a set of simple principles which he took on at an early age and never wavered from: *‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’* and *‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’.*

*‘Once these principles are accepted’,* he said*, ‘respect for others, truth, empathy, compassion, tolerance and humility naturally follow. These principles in no way interfere with one’s search for goals along one’s journey in life, but simply determine the manner in which they are achieved. A fierce determination to succeed should never ignore these qualities.’*

Dr Pickering was born to Hilda Bleckly and George Pickering on the 30 April 1934 and from the age of five years old, never wavered in his conviction that he would become a doctor.

His personal life was equally characterised by predestiny as his childhood was spent living in Tusmore, just five houses away from the girl who would later become his wife of 63 years, Marilyn (Lindy). The pair became great friends at Rose Park Primary School and jointly topped their year seven class.

Dr Pickering went on to St Peter’s College where he was awarded House Colours in his final year, won the Headmaster’s Prize, and enjoyed being a part of the football and cricket teams. As was his tradition, he formed lasting bonds and enjoyed regular lunches with a group of Saints Old Scholars up until the last year of his life.

The St Peter’s formal – the Blue and White – in 1950 became his first date with Lindy. They were both 16 years old, and were inseparable from then on.

True to his childhood promise, Dr Pickering studied medicine at Adelaide University and graduated in 1957. He and Lindy married in the first term holidays of his final year and, following an intern year at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, moved to the Ashburton Public Hospital in New Zealand, planning to return to a rural general practice in South Australia.

Yet at the urging of the hospital surgeon, Dr Pickering embarked on fellowship in surgery, travelling as a ship’s surgeon to study in London with Lindy pregnant with their first child.

Dr Pickering forged a life-long love of London, catching the bus to lectures during the day, and working as an after-hours locum GP at night. To his disappointment, he failed the primary exam for the Fellowship on the first attempt and, with funds dwindling and a young family to support, he felt that his future was on a knife’s edge. But as Dr Guy Maddern notes, ‘into this situation arrived his colleague and friend from Adelaide, Ross Johnson, who was always able to see a win: win in any situation. Ross offered to utilise all the expensive College course material Trevor had paid for in his initial attempt in exchange for being a study partner.’ The plan worked and the pair sat the exam successfully together – although celebrations were curtailed in sympathy for their companion who unfortunately failed for the 14th time.

The new state-of-the-art Queen Elizabeth Hospital (TQEH) offered Dr Pickering a position as Senior Surgical Registrar (sight unseen), supported by Sir Rupert Magarey, and he returned with his family to begin an association that would last 35 years. Eminent surgeon, Bill Proudman took Dr Pickering under his wing, teaching him new medical procedures and together they performed the first successful kidney transplant in Australia in 1965.

Dr Pickering also worked as an emergency surgeon at the Adelaide Children’s Hospital, shared the role of visiting surgeon at Murray Bridge, and regularly visited Snowtown. He consulted at the St Agnes Medical Centre and was Consultant Vascular Surgeon at Modbury Hospital.

In 1969, three members of the renal transplant team, including Dr Pickering , contracted hepatitis B from one of the transplant patients. With no treatment available, he lay in bed for 10 weeks, ~~took eight months off work,~~ and waited to get better. This perhaps underpinned his great belief in the value of time in healing. It is only this year, almost 60 years later, that the Medical Board requires a check for hepatitis B/C and HIV status to practice invasive procedures, Dr Maddern observes.

Dr Pickering retired after a coronary health scare in 1994, although he spent time each week mentoring his successor, a young Dr Maddern, in the role of Professor of Surgery and Head of Surgery at TQEH, providing a thoughtful strategy to navigate the politics of surgery, health and teaching. ‘He was never wrong,’ Dr Maddern says.

While Dr Pickering remained on a range of committees and boards, he and Lindy embarked on an era of caravanning and cruising with friends, traversing Australia and the globe from Alaska to Antarctica. The pair enjoyed a rich life with their children, Cheryl and Craig and their partners, their grandchildren, Alex, Thomas, Martha and Saskia, and their many friends, until Lindy died in 2020 – just three months short of the 70th anniversary of that first date at the Blue and White.

As a surgeon, Dr Pickering is remembered as measured, calm, reassuring and compassionate. As a medical statesman and leader, he was dutiful, courteous and prudent. ‘He was a man of wisdom. He knew what was true and right, and coupled that with just judgement as to action,’ says Dr Joseph.

Importantly he is described also as ‘a great listener’; administratively brilliant’; ‘admired by all’; and ‘one of the nicest, best men I have ever known.’

As daughter, Cheryl notes: ‘he had the art of truly being present in a moment and with a person, allowing them to feel seen and cared about, and gently offering a fresh perspective on their situation. He was a true healer, and he made enormous contributions to his profession’.

***This Obituary was provided by the Australian Medical Association (SA)***