

AGENDA ITEM 1.8 OBITUARY

MR RICHARD (DICK) MURRAY TOOTH OAM FRACS ORTHOPAEDIC SURGEON 21 SEPTEMBER 1929 – 5 AUGUST 2020

Richard Murray Tooth was born at home in Bombala at the start of the great depression in 1929. He was one of three children, with a brother Peter and a sister Margie. With employment difficult, his father found a job in a town called Come By Chance – a great omen for his future. When he was a teenager, Dick's family moved to Newcastle, where he made his mark joining the surf club (representing them at a national level) and playing football for his school and district. The source of his broken nose, ironically, was being hit in the face with a cricket ball.

In 1948 he started his academic career at Sydney University and attended St Andrews College. Here he met John Solomon, a renowned Sydney University rugby player. Eventually they both captained the Wallabies and became lifelong friends. Dick had a bad start at Sydney University Football Club, as he had played Rugby League at school and played against the 'Little Master', Clive Churchill. There was obvious bias to those with a rugby background in team selections at Sydney University. This did not bother him, as he was selected into the Australian Universities team from second grade.

His life changed dramatically one beautiful summer evening in December 1952. He met Marianne Strenstrom, the daughter of the Swedish consul. They subsequently married and had four children: Robyn, Chris, Liane and Kate. Liane had a major Olympic record, competing in field hockey in four Olympics, with two gold medals.

Dick, despite having been a captain and champion Wallaby, a representative surf life saver, an A-grade tennis player, a single-figure golfer and a champion squash player, was always humble and caring. His contact with sports inspired him to find a better way of diagnosing and treating the subsequent injuries he met in practise, so he set up the first dedicated clinic looking after sportsmen and women. The clinic opened at Sydney Hospital, the first sports clinic in Australia in the first hospital in Australia.

He realised he needed other doctors to contribute to this need. He had heard of happenings in America, where doctors would attend College games and treat the injuries on the spot, before pain and swelling started making it difficult to accurately diagnose the exact site of the injury. He visited Dr Don Slocum in Eugene, Don O'Donohue in Kansas and Jack Hughston in Columbus, Georgia, as well as many others.

This opened his eyes to a new specialty, sports surgery. Having opened the first Sports clinic at Sydney, a clinic that brought many athletes both nationally and locally to his care, enabled him to congregate many patients and learn from and compare the mechanisms of their injuries. As a rugby league player, having had a shoulder dislocation with complications I was immediately drawn to investigating and meeting Dr Tooth. I contacted him and asked if any of the clinics he had visited in America were interested in having a visiting Australian fellow. Fellowships were unheard of at that time, but Dick, having approached them on his next visit, said that Dr Jack Hughston in Columbus, Georgia, was interested. I was fortunate to receive that fellowship and spent 1973 there.

Anterior cruciate injuries were often missed or disregarded. The only diagnostic tools were a good history and examination. Complete knee examination was in its infancy, as exemplified by the many and varied new tests that have been taught over the last decades. X-rays for soft tissue injuries were of little help.

Dick did the first ACL reconstruction in NSW, at Sydney hospital using the Jones procedure. John Grant in Melbourne also was a pioneer of the Jones procedure.

Dick was an instigator in establishing 'The Australian Knee Club'. Following an AOA meeting in Townsville, a group of surgeons decided that we needed a subspecialty in knee research and treatment. Each state was represented and the first president was Glen Maguire, from Adelaide. We obviously had the first meeting in Adelaide and have met every year since. This allowed very frank discussion on all aspects of research and treatment of knee problems. Knee surgery was in its infancy with respect to replacement, ligament injuries and arthroscopic surgery. There is no doubt that the Knee Club, while maturing into the Knee Society, has advanced dramatically the treatment of the injured and disabled knee. No other country had a group of surgeons dedicated to the knee. Years later, the International Society of the Knee was formed.

Dick's life changed again when he received his pilot's licence. He had joined the Air Force Reserve and worked at the RAAF base treating the pilots, and this obviously whetted his appetite for flying. He and Tony Hodgkinson bought shares in a plane. This enabled them to help the country patients. Regular visits to Armidale, Grafton and other centres allowed these patients access to his expertise. It also offered great relaxation on family holidays and his hobby of following the cars in the Variety fund raising annual car bash around Australia.

Dick expanded his authority and responsibilities by becoming president of the International Society of the Knee, vice-president of AOA and president of the Knee Club. He was nationally recognised by being awarded the Order of Australia Medal.

Dick had the ability to combine family and orthopaedics extremely successfully. He and Maryanne and the family had many holidays and particularly enjoyed skiing together.

Dick was one who avoided the limelight but the limelight always followed him.

This obituary was provided by Mervyn Cross OAM