

## **AGENDA ITEM 1.8 OBITUARY**

**MR RONALD GEOFFREY KAY FRACS  
GENERAL SURGEON  
28 AUGUST 1929 – 25 JANUARY 2020**

Ronald Geoffrey Kay was a caring, compassionate surgeon of considerable humility who set high standards of clinical excellence, demonstrating insight and respect for his patients. He was a trusted, respected and valued colleague sought out as a mentor and teacher by many New Zealand surgeons and trainees. He was also a leader and major contributor to surgical research and education. Ron Kay was a modest man who quietly contributed much to academia and the health of all New Zealanders, but especially that of women.

Ron Kay was born in Upland Road, Auckland, one of three children born to mother, Clairra, and father, Morty Kay. He was the youngest, with sister Norma and older brother Colin (who would later become Mayor of Auckland). He started school at Kings Prep, quickly revealing his sporting prowess and proceeded to win a highly sought-after scholarship to Kings College. There, he expanded his academic capabilities and became the quintessential all-rounder! With a love of animals and having spent considerable time on the family farm he was passionate about farming, but as Ron excelled in science subjects his housemaster suggested medicine as a career.

Ron commenced at Auckland University, gaining sufficient grades to win a place at Medical School – this was a period when many places at Medical School were held for returning servicemen. In Dunedin he resided at Knox College and the period was marked by constant work with only limited time for relaxation. Ron obtained his MB ChB from Otago University in 1953.

Following graduation Ron commenced two years as house and senior house officer in Auckland hospitals. In 1956 he headed for the UK as ship's doctor on a freighter - it was suggested that he was the only patient treated as he suffered on-going bouts of seasickness. One year later, in 1957, he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. After working in a number of surgical posts, he spent 1960-62 as registrar to the Post-Graduate Medical School and Hammersmith Hospital in London. During this time he met Gillian Dawson, a nurse, who in a written invitation on a noticeboard invited Ron to partner her to the upcoming Nurses Ball – this the result of a bet for five pounds that she couldn't get the "dashing handsome kiwi doctor" to accompany her. A strong relationship resulted and they married in 1959.

In 1962 Ron and Gillian returned to New Zealand with a son, Timothy (born 1961), Ron commencing as Surgical Tutor Specialist in Auckland Hospital. Two more children, Peter (1963) and Susannah (1965) completed the family. In 1967 Ron commenced three years at the Harvard Medical School and Peter Bent Brigham Hospital as a U.S. Public Health Service Post-Doctoral Research Fellow. He returned to Auckland in 1969 and three years later was appointed Associate Professor of Surgery at the newly formed Auckland School of Medicine. Tasked with establishing an academic surgical unit with a major research section, Ron completed this work with conscientious attention to detail, considerable flair and superb judgement. He was able to secure the cooperation of colleagues in respect to undergraduate and graduate teaching. Ron subsequently developed an innovative program for the surgery examination.

During the late 1960s Ron was a pioneer in the use of intravenous nutrition in New Zealand. His extensive research in the field of Zinc and Selenium deficiency, revolutionary Gastic-band surgery, and his tireless devotion to the field of Breast surgery have all had a major impact on the advancements and successes in these fields we see today. His leadership resulted in a number of seminal papers and contributed to the saving of numerous lives.

He gained widespread recognition reflecting his unique and sustained contribution over more than 30 years to breast cancer research through his collaboration in international trials involving surgical and general management of breast cancer. He was a member of the first group undertaking clinical trials of breast cancer treatment in New Zealand and a foundation member of the Board of the Australia and New Zealand Breast Cancer Trials Group. He was also a foundation member of the International Ludwig Institute Breast Cancer Trials Group, subsequently the world leading International Breast Cancer Study Group. These groups were at the forefront of clinical trials of chemotherapy for breast cancer during the 1980s and Auckland was extensively involved.

In addition to his research, Ron devoted much of his practicing career to the improvement of standards in the management of breast cancer, founded upon evidence-based practice. This included promoting breast conserving surgery instead of simple or radical mastectomy. He was the founding chairman of the Auckland Breast Cancer study group which in 1976, with great foresight, established a detailed breast cancer register, this data promoting beneficial change in the management of breast cancer. Unfortunately, the introduction of the Privacy Bill led to its cessation, but approximately 10 years ago, assisted with funding from the New Zealand Breast Cancer Foundation, Ron restarted this register and it is once again an increasingly valuable resource.

In addition to publishing an impressive array of research papers Ron served on numerous advisory committees and medical boards. His mana was recognised in the invitation to provide The Hunterian lecture at the Royal College of Surgeons in 1978. The RACS acknowledged Ron's significant contributions to surgery in making him the recipient of the ESR Hughes Award in 2012.

Teal Bay played a massive part in the family's lives. Many summer and winter holidays were spent at the bach there. With the bach along came a boat, now named Dr Ron in recognition of its builder and prime sailor. Boating represented water-skiing, picnics, fishing, snorkelling and discovering new places. Skiing was another family passion with many holidays spent with the Gillman family on the slopes of Ruapehu. Throughout his life Ron maintained a love for sport and travel.

Even more important than his medical successes, Ronald was a loving, and caring husband. He was a devoted father, and a family man who cared deeply about others and frankly was an all-round good guy. Gentle smiling, warmly benign and generous with his opinions, it must however be noted that Ronald was known, at times, to be a little stubborn, resulting in a loud admonishment from his wife "Oh Ronald, you really take the cake!".

Ron Kay, loved husband of Gill for 61 years, passed away peacefully at Edmund Hillary Village. He was the dearly loved father of Tim, Peter and Soozie, and grandfather to four children.

*This obituary was prepared with significant contributions by John Gillman FRACS and Soozie Maddren; and with information from the RACS citation for the ESR Hughes Award.*