**AGENDA ITEM 1.7a**

**OBITUARY**

**DR BELINDA MARY SCOTT FRACS**

**GENERAL SURGEON**

**8 NOVEMBER 1957 – 16 MAY 2021**

Belinda Scott was born in new Plymouth in 1957. Her father was a senior member of the New Zealand Police having emigrated from a similar position in England. The family had many moves because of that occupation but eventually they settled mostly in Wellington and the Hutt Valley. Her mother, who was a highly regarded public health nurse, had intended a career in medicine but was discouraged from doing so by her own father who thought that medicine was no place for a woman.

Belinda had her secondary education at Wellington Girls College and despite only modestly good bursary marks went to Otago university to sit the medical intermediate year. She worked tirelessly and secured a place in second year graduating in medicine in 1981.

She spent her house surgeon years at Wellington and Napier hospitals and her surgical trainee years in Wellington. As her mother had experienced, there was an unspoken but general disapproval of women entering surgery in those years. Fortunately, she had two outstanding advocates. One was Richard Stewart, Professor of Surgery. I remember him speaking to me in glowing terms about Belinda’s technical expertise saying that she had the potential for an outstanding career in surgery. Her other supporter was general surgeon Ted Watson who recognised in her a steely commitment to succeed in her chosen field of surgery. Having failed her first attempt at the Fellowship exam he offered regular tutorial advice and mock exams to enable Belinda to easily pass the Fellowship exam at her second attempt in 1986. These men are both still remembered today as outstanding surgeons and educators. Recalling those times Belinda said, "Failure teaches you if you really want something.” Belinda then stayed in Wellington as a general and breast surgeon until moving to Auckland in 1994.

Since medical school she had had an enduring friendship with classmate James Beetham. This matured eventually to a deeper and stronger relationship culminating in their marriage in 1988. Arrival of their children in the early years of their marriage complicated both their training pathways requiring them to juggle childcare to meet the demands of on call work and study. To their mutual credit they eventually achieved their goals James becoming an outstanding and very busy General Practitioner.

The District Health Boards of the time to whom Belinda applied for general surgical positions did not seem kindly disposed to accommodating those, particularly women, seeking part time positions to enable them to manage their families. So, regrettably, her ability to express her undoubted talents as a teacher and practitioner were lost to the public sector. Undaunted she established her own private practice exclusively in breast surgery.

In 1995, Belinda became the first woman to start her own breast clinic in New Zealand. She described the decision to go out on her own as a big risk: "My nurse and I sat on the floor – we didn't have desks – asking, 'Will anyone come?'" They came, and continued to come, and soon Breast Associates was the first clinic to pool all the necessary breast care services on one site – surgeon, GP, breast physician, radiology, and more. Her philosophy was that every woman has a right to good advice and excellent care, delivered in a caring manner. Over the years, she treated thousands of New Zealand women on that basis. Committed to scrutinising every aspect of her own work and her clinic’s, she strived for continual improvement. She remained Managing Director of Breast Associates until her retirement due to ill health in 2015.

In 1994, deeply concerned at the escalating rates of breast cancer in New Zealand Belinda became deeply involved with The New Zealand Breast Cancer Foundation. As part of that Foundation, Belinda talked widely and publicly about breast cancer, educating women about mammograms for early detection and improved survival. For many years she remained a member of the Board of Trustees and for seven years the Chair of the Medical Advisory Committee and a long-time member of the Board of Trustees.

In her own practice, she advocated for less radical breast cancer surgery and performed New Zealand’s first sentinel lymph node biopsy, now a standard procedure for breast cancer patients.

Belinda served on the management committee of the Australasian Society of Breast Diseases, encouraging a multidisciplinary approach to breast cancer and breast disease that has now become standard. She was a foundation member of Breast Surgeons of Australia and New Zealand and, as a member of the Australia & New Zealand Breast Cancer Trials Group, participated in several ground-breaking clinical trials. Belinda was a strong advocate for what is now the Breast Cancer Foundation National Register, which over the years has expanded to track treatment and outcomes for every patient in New Zealand. To acknowledge her substantial contribution, Breast Cancer Foundation NZ has named one of its fellowship grants in her honour: the BCFNZ Belinda Scott Clinical Fellowship intended to develop the career and research pathways of promising young doctors.

Away from surgery she enjoyed a wide range of activities. She was a great lover of the outdoors with skiing, biking, and tramping taking pride of place. At home in addition to giving love and support to her family she was an accomplished pianist and avid reader. She had a huge circle of friends and was much admired by them all for her loyalty and honesty. Her sense of humour was legendary and brightened many a long day in the operating theatre.

Ill health supervened in 2015 causing a premature retirement from clinical practice. The inexorable decline in her function occasioned by dementia took a heavy toll on her friends and family but it is a testament to the respect and love she generated in those closest to her that they supported and cared for her to the very end.

She is survived by her husband James and their children Henry, Penny, and Sara. Hopefully it is some comfort to them that the surgical community will recall Belinda with huge respect and gratitude for the example she set and the high benchmarks she established for clinical practice.

*The assistance of Belinda’s family and close friends and the Breast Cancer Foundation in preparing this tribute is gratefully acknowledged.*

P G Alley FRACS