

Media Release

New scholarship to support surgical health care across the Asia-Pacific

7 April 2020

Doctors from across the Asia-Pacific will have the opportunity to develop their surgical skills, thanks to a new scholarship which has been established by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS).

The *Katherine Edyvane Scholarship in Humanitarian Surgery* is targeted at doctors and medical specialists based in Timor-Leste and other developing countries in the Asia Pacific region. The scholarship supports short term training activities and is aimed at improving health care in recipients' countries.

The scholarship was established through a bequest to the RACS' Foundation for Surgery from Timorese medical colleagues and the family of Dr Katherine Edyvane FRACS, following her passing from cancer in 2015.

The scholarship honours the memory and legacy of Dr Edyvane, who was renowned not only as a brilliant, highly skilled general surgeon, but also for her deep sense of social justice and compassion and commitment to the public health system.

After obtaining her Fellowship with RACS in 2006, one of her first assignments as a Fellow was to volunteer as the RACS Surgeon and Team Leader in the Earthquake Disaster Response to Pakistan. The massive earthquake left more than 90,000 dead, 106,000 injured and 3.3 million homeless. In the freezing Kashmiri winter, living 4 to a room in the make-shift hospital for 6 weeks, with virtually no hot water and power, she delivered surgical care, often in tents, for the victims. This set the scene for an exceptional career dedicated to international surgical aid and development - delivering surgical services and training to some of world's poorest countries.

Most notably was Dr Edyvane's decade-long, surgical involvement in Timor-Leste, a country she fell in love with after an initial two-month placement in 2006. She returned for a two year assignment in 2007 as part of the Australian- Government-funded *Australia-Timor-Leste Program of Assistance in Surgical Services*, and then again for Phase Two of the program throughout 2013 and 2014 - ranking her among RACS's longest serving surgeons in Dili.

Over this time, she led surgical services and training of the country's surgeons and general practitioners at the Hospital Nacional Guido Valadares (HNGV) - closely mentoring some of the country's first surgical trainees (many of whom are now Consultants). In her very limited spare time – and when not 'in country' - she also dedicated herself to improving health resources and training, including writing the country's first training resources and surgical manuals; implementing Timor-Leste's first breast cancer awareness program (with the Alola Foundation); and pioneering the Women's Medical Association for Timorese medical staff.

Dr Edyvane's twin sister, Professor Karen Edyvane, said her sister understood the vital importance of free access to higher education, having gained degrees in Australia in science and medical biochemistry, before studying medicine and becoming a surgeon.

"We grew up in Southern England in a large, single-income, working class family of 7 children – university education was completely out of our reach. I have no doubt that Katherine developed her deep sense of social justice and compassion from her first-hand experience of poverty and social disadvantage. She also knew the extraordinary power of free health and education to save and transform lives," Professor Edyvane said.

Dr Edyvane was also a foundation member and first Life Member, of 'Specialists Without Borders' (SWB) – a 'non-for-profit' organisation dedicated to taking medical education into developing countries. In this role she volunteered on surgical training missions to Rwanda, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

In 2015, Dr Edyvane was presented with the prestigious, RACS International Medal, for her "outstanding contribution to international surgery and surgical education in Timor Leste, Pakistan and Africa". In the same year, SWB established the 'Katherine Edyvane Scholarship in International Surgery' to sponsor doctors or nurses to participate with SWB to teach in developing countries.

Throughout her outstanding career as an international surgeon, Dr Edyvane remained a dedicated teacher, educator and humanitarian. As a passionate and energetic member of the RACS Faculty of Surgical Educators, she was also a powerful role model to other surgeons, particularly female surgeons, not only in education, but in international surgical aid, with many now following in her footsteps.

Dr Alito Soares, Head of Surgery at the HNGV (and one of the Dr Edyvane's former trainees) summed up the impact of Dr Edyvane and the new RACS scholarship program for Timor-Leste and the region:

"In Doctora Katerina's short life, she touched and profoundly changed the lives of many. And significantly, for her trainees- like me - she has also left a lasting legacy in teaching, training and inspiring a generation of doctors and surgeons, particularly in Timor-Leste and Australia."

"The new 'Katherine Edyvane Scholarship in Humanitarian Surgery' will now enable surgical trainees across the Asia-Pacific to continue her humanitarian legacy and help improve public health care in Timor-Leste and other developing countries."

"Doctora or Mana Katerina would be so happy to know that through this scholarship, her spirit lives on in helping Timorese surgeons, doctors, trainees and most of all, patients," said Dr Soares.

Links to Key Resources:

- Katherine Edyvane Scholarship in Humanitarian Surgery - <https://www.surgeons.org/resources/member-benefits-services/scholarships-grants-awards-lectures-and-prizes/global-health-scholarships/katherine-edyvane-scholarship-in-humanitarian-surgery>
- Obituary of Dr Katherine Edyvane - <https://www.surgeons.org/about-racs/about-the-college-of-surgeons/in-memoriam/obituaries/katherine-edyvane>