

Professor Judith Ann Whitworth AC

Inspired to a career in medicine while watching medical staff during a long hospital stay as a child, Professor Judith Whitworth's advancement of scientific research and medical knowledge have reached far beyond what she could then have imagined. Her influence has been manifested through her own scientific research, her guidance in the arenas of medical health policy research, and her professional leadership.

Time spent in a clinical research unit attached to the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, during a residence at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, ignited an interest in medical research – an interest which Judith Whitworth kept alight during physician training early in her career.

She has made foundation contributions in three key areas. Firstly, her fundamental interest in the role of glucocorticoid steroid hormones in the regulation of blood pressure have advanced scientific knowledge and clinical practice. Leading on from this work has been her involvement in the development of clinical guidelines for hypertension, appropriate not only in Australia, but worldwide. Her third area of contribution is in research for better health policy, where the use of research informs policy and generates evidence-informed policy for decision makers.

Her research scholarship career, from her early fellowship at the Howard Florey Institute to her directorship of the John Curtin School of Medical Research, has been one of supporting translational science: beginning with fundamental discovery, moving through early human studies establishing proof of concept, feasibility and safety, to larger clinical trials establishing efficacy and finally, to changes in healthcare guidelines and policy. Her governance roles in many hospitals and health services have been an integral and complementary role.

Judith Whitworth has published extensively and has held over twenty visiting professorships and lectureships throughout the world. She held the appointment of Australia's Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer and was made a Companion in the Order of Australia in 2001 for service to the advancement of academic medicine and as a major contributor to research policy and medical research administration in Australia and internationally. She was Chair of the WHO Global Advisory Committee on Health Research from 2005 - 2011.

The value of Judith Whitworth's contributions to the development and advancement of medical research are signified by her extensive involvement in roles of governance, leadership and advice. In addition to her guidance of umbrella organisations such as the Royal Australasian College of Physicians and the Australian Society for Medical Research, she has assumed leadership and founding roles in a range of specialist professional organisations.

Her long association with the National Health and Medical Research Council, of which she chaired the Medical Research Committee from 1994-96, shows the value placed on her expertise in medical and public health research and is a measure of the respect in which she is held by peers and policy makers.

Judith Whitworth serves as an exemplar of a medical research career with a strong Australian foundation, but also, importantly, one that has given example and support to young women in science. Her strong voice for the mentorship and inclusion of women arises in part from her close professional relationship with Priscilla Kincaid-Smith, with whom she has worked and published extensively, and whom she counts as a mentoring influence.