

## **AWARD OF HONORARY DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MEDICINE**

### **DR DONALD WILLIAM HOSSACK**

Donald Hossack was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1926 in Melbourne. He left Preston Technical School at the age of 13 to begin work because he was regarded as unable to pass any exams. He started as a 'laboratory boy' at the age of 15 in the Department of Zoology at the University of Melbourne in 1941.

He excelled in the laboratory and Professors Wilfred Agar and Oscar Tiegs both recognised that young Donald was a very bright boy who had a significant learning disability. Nonetheless, having assisted medical students in their practical classes in the laboratory, and with the encouragement of the Professors, he resolved to get into medical school. He studied nights at Taylor's Coaching College, getting his 'intermediate' subjects. In what would prove to be a life-changing intervention, Professor Agar then facilitated Donald's entry into University High School. Matriculating in 1945, he failed to get into Medicine immediately due to the influx of returned servicemen. So he completed pharmacy training and then was admitted to Medical School in 1948. Graduating MBBS in 1954, he interned at Royal Melbourne Hospital, and then went on to complete his surgical training at the Melbourne (FRACS 1959) and then in London (FRCS 1960).

In 1961, he returned to Melbourne to take up a post as surgeon at Prince Henry's Hospital. He was subsequently appointed Consultant Surgeon to the State Government's Mental Health Authority. Dr Eric Dax, then Chairman of the Mental Hygiene Authority of Victoria, had set about restructuring and humanising the State's mental health services, the system having suffered for decades from neglect, especially in rural areas. Donald Hossack was tasked with organising a surgical service that was as good or better than that provided in the general hospital system, something that he achieved admirably. He personally operated on thousands of psychiatric patients. Later, as institutions were phased out, he ensured that psychiatric patients were provided access to surgical services in the general system, something that previously had been refused. In the midst of all this he found time to complete a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Melbourne (1976).

But it was in an entirely different field that Dr Hossack was to make his most important contribution to the community through scholarly research and advocacy. On returning to Australia, he had been appalled at the high and rising death rate from motor vehicle accidents. Having also been appointed Consultant Surgeon to Melbourne City Coroner, he was granted permission to perform autopsies on fatal driver, passenger and pedestrian road accident victims. Over the ensuing years, he performed over one thousand autopsies with special regard to the role of alcohol and drugs in accidents and the various patterns of injury in relation to causal pathways. His work was published in the surgical and other medical literature, and he presented his findings at major international conferences in Europe and North America. He was a persistent and vocal advocate for road safety measures and often appeared in the press and on television. His research was very important in the State Government's world-leading initiatives to legislate in relation to compulsory seat belts and drink driving restrictions. These legal, in effect, public health interventions have since been responsible for many thousands of lives saved.

For his services to the community, Donald Hossack was awarded an OBE in 1982 and the Public Service Medal in 1992.