

PROFESSOR DEREK ASHWORTH DENTON

Derek Ashworth (Dick) Denton was born in Launceston, Tasmania, on 27 May 1924. He graduated in medicine from the University of Melbourne in 1947 and embarked on a career as a research physiologist, mentored by Professor Roy Douglas Wright.

In 1948 he was appointed Haley research fellow at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute. In 1949 he set up the Ionic Research Unit, supported as a Senior and then Principal research fellow of National Health & Medical Research Council, in the Department of Physiology at the University of Melbourne.

Between 1964 and 1970 he was Administrative Head and Chief Scientist of the Howard Florey Laboratories of Experimental Physiology in the Department of Physiology, and was Founding Director of the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine (1971). He was the University's foundation Professor of Experimental Physiology and Medicine, 1997-89. Professor Denton's leadership saw the Howard Florey Institute flourish and become one of the world's leading medical research institutes.

Professor Denton is internationally acclaimed for his research into the control of the chemical balance of fluids in the human body, and the genetically programmed brain mechanisms contributing to their control. He has been elected a member of the most prestigious scientific academies in the world. He was elected a Foreign Medical Member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in 1974, a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Sciences in 1979, an Honorary Foreign Member, American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1986, an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, London in 1988, a Fellow of the Royal Society (London) in 1999, and the French Academy of Sciences in 2003. In 2004 Professor Denton was made a Fellow of Trinity College, University of Melbourne – the highest honour the College can bestow – for his outstanding contribution to science. From 1978 until 1990 he was a member of the prestigious Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation Basic and Clinical Medical Research Awards Jury.

His major area of interest has been instinctive behaviour, including that which controls the water and balance of salts in the body, and evolution of the mechanisms involved. The National Academy of Sciences of the U.S.A. at his election in 1995, cited him as the world's leading authority on the regulation of salt and water metabolism and relevant endocrine control mechanisms. Apart from hundreds of articles in specialist journals, he has also published the seminal book *The Hunger for Salt* (London, 1983), recently described by Dr John Pappenheimer, Emeritus Professor of Physiology at Harvard University, as "The best example of integrative physiology to come out of the 2nd half of the 20th Century".

Since 1989, Professor Denton has continued his research as Director Emeritus of the Howard Florey Institute. He is now actively involved in the study of consciousness, dealing particularly with the organisation within the brain of instincts and primordial emotions. Most recently, his groundbreaking new book, *The Primordial Emotions : The Dawning of Consciousness*, has been published in 2005 by Flammarion in Paris and by Oxford University Press in 2006. It proposes a novel theory of the evolutionary emergence of consciousness.