

Citation for the award of Honorary Doctor of Medical Science Dr Margaret Mary Henderson OBE

Margaret Henderson's capacity for academic excellence was evident early in her life when, at sixteen years old, she won a Government University Exhibition. Too young for university, she repeated her leaving honours, and then took a year of science at the University of Western Australia before moving to The University of Melbourne to study medicine.

After graduating MBBS in 1938, the shared recipient of the Exhibition in Surgery, Margaret joined the Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH) where she was employed as a resident medical officer for two years. As the tide of war swept over Australia, taking with it many of her contemporaries, Margaret Henderson sat for and took out an MD; undertook research at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute; worked with Euan Littlejohn in general practice at Ivanhoe and in Medical Outpatients at the RMH; and served with the Australian Military Forces with the rank of Captain.

As the war ended Margaret Henderson was recruited by the Red Cross for post-war civilian work and soon found herself as Senior Medical Officer leading a team of ten working in outlying Malay villages and dealing with a range of nutritional and tropical diseases.

After her time with the Red Cross, while working in London and Switzerland, Margaret Henderson developed an interest in specialising in respiratory and thoracic medicine obtaining membership, then fellowship, of the Royal College of Physicians and of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians. While still in London she was appointed Honorary Physician to Outpatients at the Royal Melbourne Hospital; the first woman to be appointed to the hospital's honorary staff. Writing in her autobiography, she notes that she had 'really applied mainly to strike a blow for women in medicine – and then put it out of [her] mind as being far too great a break with tradition'. One of only a few women medical graduates at the time, this was one of many blows Margaret Henderson struck for women in an era where greater tenacity and talent were required to achieve parity with men.

Acutely aware of how her own and others' actions influenced prospects for other women, her strength of character, and an uncommonly perceptive mind, made her widely recognised and highly regarded throughout the profession. That this ground-breaking appointment was well advised is evidenced by the high esteem in which Margaret Henderson was held throughout her career, and the many medical students and residents who sought her out as a teacher. Upon her retirement in 1981 she was appointed honorary consultant physician.

In addition to her work at the RMH, she was Honorary Physician to the Queen Victoria Hospital and Medical Officer to Janet Clarke Hall for many years. She also provided outstanding service to the Management Committee of the Royal District Nursing Service for 18 years, including four years as Vice President.

She was awarded the Order of the British Empire for services to medicine in 1976, a rare distinction in that era.

Margaret Henderson is an eminently suitable candidate for the degree of Doctor of Medical Science *honoris causa*. Her quietly aspiring and astutely comprehensive approach to the pursuit of clinical excellence and the integration of research into practice has been a beacon for medical students and practitioners alike.

It is 125 years since women were admitted to the medical course at the University of Melbourne. There have been many outstanding contributions to the practice of medicine, to teaching and research by generations of women graduates. Margaret Henderson was a leader and pioneer in establishing the rightful place of women in medicine.

Reflecting on the extraordinary changes in Medicine which took place during her extended career, Margaret Henderson noted that: 'What is unchanging is the need we all have for the understanding, the explaining, the assurance and the support we ask from our physicians'. These insightful words reveal the core of Margaret Henderson's exceptional standing, as a physician, and as a teacher of physicians.