

Stokes a giant of Western Australian medicine



Bryant Stokes and Rosanna Capolingua.

Western Australia lost a veritable giant of medicine with the passing in February at the age of 89 of former AMA (WA) President Professor Bryant Stokes AO, who made a permanent impression on fields including neurosurgery, academia and healthcare governance in the State.

Bryant Allan Rigbye Stokes was born in January 1937 and was the captain of Wesley College before he graduated in Medicine from the University of Western Australia in 1959. He was admitted to Fellowship of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in 1965.

Bryant – affectionately known to his colleagues as Bars – was recognised as one of the nation's leading neurosurgeons, and contributed to the development of neurosurgery both in WA and Australia.

However, much of his extensive leadership career was centred on government and clinical governance roles. Prof Stokes held several significant roles within Western Australia's health system, including Chief Medical Officer (1995-2001), Acting Commissioner of Health (2000), and Acting Director General of Health (2013-2015).

Prof Stokes was appointed Chair of the North Metropolitan Health Service Board in 2016 and was Chair of the WA Council on Safety and Quality in Health Care (2002-2009).

In 1982 he was elected President of the AMA (WA) and admitted to the AMA's Roll of Fellows in 1984. The Association also recognised him as one of the three founders of the Clinical Training and Evaluation Centre (CTEC). In 2000 Prof Stokes received an AMA award for services to medicine.

He was a consultant neurosurgeon at Royal Perth Hospital, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Princess Margaret Hospital and Fremantle Hospital and served on numerous medical advisory panels and committees throughout his long and dedicated career.

He was Clinical Associate Professor of Neurosurgery as well as Adjunct Professor in Surgical Anatomy at the University of WA, and Professor of Anatomy at Notre Dame University.

Prof Stokes was also a Director of the Medical Research Foundation at RPH, a past President of the Neurosurgical Society of

Australasia, and a former Chief Examiner in neurosurgery for the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.

In 2001 Prof Stokes was made a Member of the General Division of the Order of Australia for his services to medicine; and in 2008 he was invested to the Sovereign Order of St John of Jerusalem 'Knights Hospitaller'.

More recently, his outstanding contribution to Australian healthcare was recognised by his appointment as an Officer in the General Division (AO) of the Order of Australia in the 2020 Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Former AMA (WA) and AMA Federal President Associate Prof Rosanna Capolingua, who was a close friend of Prof Stokes, reflected on the qualities that made him special.

"He had a personal drive to understand, question, scrutinise, learn, implement change, and get a better outcome," she said. "He knew how to work with everyone. He was ahead of his time. He was a leader in so many things, and his legacy will last." ■



Bryant Stokes in the operating theatre.