

Pioneering gynaecologist devoted her career to women's health



A leading champion of hormone therapy, Dr Margaret Smith AM, who established the first menopause clinic in WA, has died at the age of 94.

Dr Smith, an honorary life member of AMA (WA), delivered close to 6,000 babies during her 55 years as a physician and was dedicated to treating women with hormonal issues.

Her life-changing work was recognised with an award of WA Citizen of the Year in the professional category in 1994 and an Order of Australia in 1996. She was inducted into the WA Women's Hall of Fame in 2011.

"Margaret believed that women could make the best decision regarding their care through education," recalls Dr Dale Hamilton, a former colleague. "She organised and presented many seminars and lectures for the public.

"She also did much to educate GPs and specialists about menopause through changing attitudes towards hormonal therapy."

John Newnham AM, Professor of Obstetrics at The University of Western Australia, remembers attending Dr Smith's lectures when he was a medical student.

"Margaret was extremely bright and very scholarly, but had a good sense of humour. She was the full package really, and I adored her," Prof Newnham says.

"When I was a medical student, most of the lecturers would walk in, stand behind the lectern, and in a monotone

voice recite a whole lot of stuff. It was about as exciting as watching paint dry. Margaret did not do that. She was walking up and down, her arms would be going all over the place. And in the middle of delivering all of this incredibly important medical information, there would be some wonderful catchphrases.

"The one I remember the best was when she gave a lecture on breech presentation. Underneath the title, 'Breech Presentation', she would always have, 'Once more into the breach, dear friends'.

"Margaret was a huge figure, hugely popular, and had an immense ability as a public speaker to captivate the room. I sat there as a young medical student thinking, 'If ever I'm in a position to do this sort of thing, I would like to be as much like her as I possibly can'. She had a very big influence on me."

Margaret "Margie" Smith was born in Adelaide on 14 July, 1932. She knew from the age of 10 that she wanted to be a doctor, and went on to study medicine at Adelaide University – one of only a handful of women in her year.

She graduated in 1956 and went to the UK for five years of specialist training in obstetrics and gynaecology. In her MRCOG examinations, she won the UK Gold Medal for the highest performing student.

She then spent seven years in Goroka in New Guinea, dealing with complications of childbirth she had never encountered before; acting as obstetrician, physician and sometimes anaesthetist, without the support of speciality teams.

Dr Smith moved to Perth in 1972 joining The University of WA as a senior lecturer in obstetrics and gynaecology at King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH). In 1978 she established the first menopause clinic at KEMH.

From 1987 to 2011 she was in private practice developing a thriving obstetric practice dedicated to treating women with hormonal issues, especially those relating to menopause and perimenopause.

Dr Smith was a foundation member of the Australian Menopause Society, and its first female president from 1995 to 1997.

She wrote three books: *Midlife assessment – a handbook for women*; *Is it me or my hormones? Understanding midlife change*; and a memoir, *Now and then – a gynaecologist's journey*.

Dr Smith died peacefully on 14 July in the early hours of her 94th birthday. ■



Dr Margaret Smith AM