



The Australian Pain Society

2008
*Distinguished
Member
Awards*

Awarded for services to the promotion,
treatment and science of pain management
and lifelong contribution to the
Australian Pain Society.

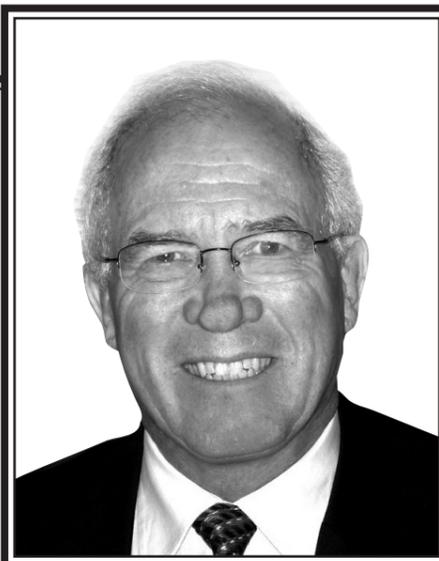
From the start of medical school John Ditton was interested in psychiatry, psychology, and human behaviour. However being better at numbers rather than words, he decided after graduation and a residency at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, to become an anaesthetist.

At the time of his anaesthetic training there was no staff member in the Anaesthetic Department at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital who had an interest in the management of pain. There was also little

interest in the department in regional anaesthesia other than in the obstetric service. John attended Dr Brian Dwyer's Pain Unit at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney and then decided to seek further training in pain management overseas.

During 1973 and 1974 he worked in London, in Västerås, Sweden and also at the Southampton University Hospital where he had an informal attachment to the pain management services. He then obtained a position as a Clinical Fellow at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. This position included six months formal training in the pain management service run by an excellent clinician, Dr Donald Todd.

John Ditton returned to Australia in 1976 to a staff specialist position at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. He had five sessions a week giving anaesthetics and five sessions in which to develop a multidisciplinary pain service. This service began as an association with a neurosurgeon, Dr John Segelov and a psychiatrist, Prof. Peter Beaumont. The unit also had dedicated



John Ditton

MB BS, FANZCA, FFPANZCA

pain nursing staff attached. Eventually funding was also obtained for a clinical psychologist, & an occupational therapist and physiotherapist joined the multidisciplinary team. John Ditton became Head of the Pain Service in 1985 and maintained this position until 2007. He became a Visiting Medical Officer and established a private pain management practice in 1989. He has worked full time in pain medicine practice since 1993.

John Ditton presented two papers at the first Australian and New Zealand meeting on pain in Melbourne in 1978. He was active in the subsequent meeting which established the Australian and New Zealand Chapter of the International Association for the Study of Pain in 1979. The Chapter subsequently became the Australian Pain Society. After being NSW Councillor of the Society he became Vice President in 1989 and President in 1991. John Ditton was convenor of two early meetings of the association & also of a satellite meeting which followed the World Congress of Pain in 1990. The profit from the meeting which he organised in 1984 at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital established the financial basis for the Society.

John has been the Honorary Secretary of the Australian Pain Relief Association since its incorporation in 1985 and has helped direct the Association into its current role as a charity with close ties to APS.

John Ditton's major interest has always been in the clinical management of patients with pain. He taught that pain diagnoses were usually heterogeneous and

pain mechanisms multi factorial. Over the years he presented papers at Society meetings relating to pain mechanisms and the use of diagnostic nerve blocks to help identify the cause of pain. He was a pioneer in the use of radiological imagery to assist with the placement of needles for diagnostic and therapeutic injections. He introduced spinal cord stimulation as a therapeutic technique in New South Wales, and as an experienced implanter was invited by Medtronic to insert the first Matrix dual quad lead system in the world.

John Ditton has been involved with clinical trials relating to diagnostic nerve blocks, spinal cord stimulation, multidisciplinary pain services and pain education programs. He remains sceptical about the current approach to evidence based medicine which is too often about process and protocol rather than appropriate patient selection and professional expertise. He expresses the opinion that evidence based medicine can only indicate that a treatment can work and not that it is necessarily appropriate for a given patient. A negative trial does not necessarily disprove the efficacy of a treatment in some patients. He believes that patient management should be based on careful assessment of each patient and clinical judgement based on the full scope of available information and a continuing review of outcomes.

John also expresses concern that the "pain profession" may have a negative effect on the community by excessive pursuit of its cause. He believes that pain is a normal part of human existence which can be easily upregulated by cognitive and emotional processes. Inappropriate advice by the medical profession can significantly contribute to distress and disability associated with chronic pain. Alternatively appropriate education can often resolve a difficult pain problem. He believes that it is often too easy to just provide another tablet which has passed the controlled trial

hurdle, rather than to tease out the significance of nociceptive inputs, patho-physiological mechanisms and the cognitive and experiential processes which make pain a cause of distress.

John's enormous contribution to the APS has been continuing generous involvement in a variety of roles from State Director, Secretary to President. His legacy to the field of pain management in Australia has been a strong and passionate involvement in clinical pain management. He always managed to combine that with a desire to impart that knowledge to up and coming clinicians including many anaesthetists, nurses, physiotherapists and clinical psychologists. He developed the understanding of pain mechanisms and treatment among his colleagues which earned him the respect of palliative care physicians and neurologists at one of the most traditional medical institutions, RPA Hospital.

He has always been committed to the public health system in the face of medical cost cutting and has managed to create one of the largest public hospital multidisciplinary pain centres in Australia.