

Biography Prof. Tom Reeve

Professor Tom Reeve undertook medical training during the Second World War at the University of Sydney and St Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst Sydney.

Following graduation, he became a junior resident at Marrickville District Hospital in 1947 and for two years worked there with the aim of entering general practice. When he entered general practice, he worked in a remote coal mining town called Collinsville in Far North Queensland.

He had eighteen months of rich clinical experience, however at that time he was no longer sure he wanted to pursue general practice and applied to work as a post-graduate in the United States and was appointed to a rotating internship at Albany Medical College, New York.

As American surgical residents were being drafted for the Korean War he was promoted after six months and accepted an offer of five years graduated surgical training in the Halsted tradition at Albany Medical Centre. His training was predominately in general surgery, however he had three months exchange at John Hopkins where he worked in gynaecology and also witnessed the early development of cardiac surgery. His final eighteen months spent in Albany were in thoracic surgery.

His five years at Albany was shared with a global workforce from 27 nations including Japan and Germany and the chiefs of medicine and surgery offered opportunity and education to all, hoping to heal the wounds of World War II. In 1953 he married Mary Jo to whom he met in the operating room at Albany Medical College.

When he returned to Sydney in 1955 he was offered a position by Professor Frank Rundle Director of the Unit of Clinical Investigation at Royal North Shore Hospital (RNSH). It was there that he developed clinical and research interests allowing him to be involved in thyroid surgery and related studies including Isotopes and cancer chemotherapy. He undertook prospective database collection for outcomes in thyroid surgery and worked on developing ultrasound of the breast.

Tom noted that Rundle was a perfectionist demanding that every activity be of the highest safety and quality. The preoperative checklist was instituted and every operative step was to be as haemostatic as possible. These requirements became the foundation for all of those that worked and trained in what later has become known as the University of Sydney Endocrine Surgical Unit.

In 1961 academic clinical units were established throughout the University of Sydney and at Royal North Shore Hospital. Tom Reeve began as senior lecture in surgery and subsequently became the inaugural Professor of Surgery in 1974. He was noted for

outcomes in thyroid and breast surgery and trained many of the leading surgeons of that era.

He believed like Osler “An academic system without the personal influence of teachers upon pupils, is an arctic winter”.

Prior to his retirement between 1985- 1987 he became the fourth president of the International Association of Endocrine Surgeons which had been established in 1979 with Selwyn Taylor as the inaugural chair.

Tom Reeve retired from clinical practice in 1988 and was subsequently elected as President of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in 1989. Following that position, he took up positions on the Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care and was the chair of the working party developing Clinical Practice guidelines for breast cancer in Australia.

Tom Reeve is warmly remembered by all at North Shore as being a caring and a meticulous surgeon who was loved by colleagues, students and patients. In his autobiography titled “The power of one, following fortune’s path” MJA December 2004, Tom tells us:

“I have gathered a posy of other men’s flowers and only the ribbon which binds them is mine” (Sanskrit).