

Tribute to Richard Kemp 1945 – 1995



Richard Kemp was Director of Infectious Diseases at the Royal Brisbane Hospital from 1986 to 1995. He was widely recognised for his work in the treatment of people with HIV/AIDS and achieved great credibility nationally and internationally for his knowledge of broader issues of infectious diseases.

He served terms as the chairman of the Australian Clinical Trials and Treatments Advisory Committee and president of the Australasian Society for Infectious Disease. Dr Kemp was the recipient of the Walters Prize for clinical teaching from the University of Queensland and was also honoured and recognised for his work in the area of HIV medicine when he was made a member of the Order of Australia.

Richard spent virtually his entire career within the Royal Brisbane Hospital except for his time as Medical Superintendent at Longreach in Queensland from 1972 to 1979. The lasting impression he made was demonstrated by the fact that when he left, he was carried to the plane by the townsfolk. On his death, people from Longreach travelled all the way to Brisbane to attend his memorial service, and a minute's silence was observed at various clubs and institutions in the town.

In the field of HIV Medicine Richard's light shone brightly. He was well known to all those involved in the HIV/AIDS epidemic in this country, and his even-handed approach and ability to see the 'broad-brush' view enabled him to stand on equal footing with researchers, clinicians, carers, and positive people alike. At a state level Richard advised the government of the day regarding issues of care, funding, antidiscrimination and education concerning HIV/AIDS. He travelled the length and breadth of the state and country educating people from all walks of life and many different occupations about this infection and fostering a compassionate, non-judgmental and reasoned approach to the epidemic.

In what must be the ultimate irony Richard died of the infection which he spent so much time and energy fighting – HIV/AIDS. Throughout his illness he learnt and tried to educate. On ward rounds he would emphasise the apparently minor discomforts of patients which he knew only too well were major in their lives. He attempted to impart to anyone who would listen the lessons only personal experience can teach, and despite his own impending mortality he would sit with and comfort those who suffered.

Richard's legacy will be a cohort of health professionals who are more able, and more caring than they otherwise would have been, and a community better able to understand and respond to this disease and hopefully those to come.

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