

The MJA Dr Eric Dark creative writing prize

sponsored by Varuna, the Writers' House

Do you have a secret and long-stifled creative side?
Do medicine and writing somehow go hand in hand for you?

In partnership with Varuna, the Writers' House, the *Medical Journal of Australia (MJA)* is launching a creative writing competition, open to all practising and retired doctors, and medical students.

Creative pieces of up to 1500 words, grounded in health or medicine and based loosely on the topic "Splendid Isolation", will compete in two categories.

Practising and retired doctors:

Prize includes a 1-week residential writing retreat and weekend writing workshop for doctors at Varuna, the Writers' House, Katoomba, NSW.



Varuna, the Writers' House

Medical students:

Prize includes a weekend writing workshop for doctors at Varuna, the Writers' House.

Closing date: Monday, 5 March 2012

Submissions: via email to:
creativewritingcompetition@mja.com.au

Winning entries and other outstanding pieces of writing will be published in the *MJA*.

The competition is named in memory of Dr Eric Dark (see box), an Australian general practitioner and public health activist, whose wife Eleanor was one of Australia's foremost writers. After the Darks' deaths, their son, Michael, donated their former home in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney, to become a national residential writers' house, now known as Varuna, the Writers' House.

The theme for the competition is inspired by the couple's love of the bush. When the rigours of life and work in Katoomba overwhelmed them, they would often take long bushwalks or retreat to what has become known as "Dark's Cave", hidden away in nearby bushland.



Photo by Jim Starkey

ERIC DARK (1889–1987)

"Decorated serviceman ... legendary rock-climber ... visionary doctor"

Dr Eric Payten Dark graduated from the University of Sydney in 1914, and was among the first 100 Australian doctors who sailed to the United Kingdom to join the Royal Army Medical Corps. As a doctor on the Western Front at Passchendaele, France, in 1917, he won the Military Cross for "great gallantry and disregard of danger". Badly gassed while performing his medical duties during the war, he later returned to Australia and moved to the Blue Mountains to work as a general practitioner in 1923. There he founded what is thought to be Australia's earliest rock-climbing club, the Blue Mountaineers (also known to some at the time as the Katoomba Suicide Club). In 1937, the *Medical Journal of Australia* published a series of visionary articles, *Medicine and the social order*, by Dr Dark, which explored the physical, spiritual, social and economic aspects of health. Dr Dark was the husband of celebrated Australian novelist and writer, Eleanor Dark, who died in 1985.

Medicine and creative writing might seem like strange bedfellows, but many doctors practise daily the art of inhabiting others' and their own internal worlds. It helps to better understand and assist both themselves and their patients. Writing can be a way of exorcising our demons or understanding our deeper needs ... connecting writer and reader, doctor and patient.

We look forward to reading doctors' writings: your insights and your stories.

This prize is sponsored by Varuna, the Writers' House and Doctors Who ... , a recently launched Varuna initiative to nurture creativity, innovation and advocacy in the medical profession: www.doctorswho.com.au