Vernon migrated with his young family to Perth, Western Australia, in 1962. On arrival, he briefly held the position of Staff Anaesthetist at Royal Perth Hospital before being appointed the first Director of Anaesthesia at Fremantle Hospital. It was during his tenure at Fremantle that he formulated the Civil Disaster Plan for the busy port city.

Improvements in anaesthetics led him to experiment with the concept of rapid-recovery day surgery, and he opened the first custom-designed clinic, Kaleelya House, in 1968. Interest was so great that, in 1974, the first purpose-built outpatient hospital in Australia, Kaleeeya Hospital, was opened in East Fremantle. As Chairman of the Board, he oversaw the finer details, such as the selection of lime-green paint and psychedelic bed linen.

In 1980, Vernon and his wife Lyn retired to their farm, “Lanark Park”, in Wokalup, for some “peace and quiet”. But retirement proved short-lived, and he took up various medical positions around the Harvey area until ill health forced him into hospital in October 2002.

From his ward on the ninth floor of Fremantle Hospital, Vernon was reassured to see his old surgery, Kaleeeya House, and the Medical Library at Fremantle Hospital, which he had founded nearly 40 years previously. He died on 4 January 2003 from pneumonia complicated by TB damage and emphysema. He is survived by three sons and three grandchildren.

Matthew J Keep

References