Cyril Joseph Cummins
MBBS, DipPH, FACMA

FORMER DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH and a loyal and long-serving member of the New South Wales medical fraternity, Cyril Joseph Cummins spent more than 30 years committed to improving public health and health services.

Cyril was born in Sydney on 10 November 1914. He attended Marist Brothers High School, Darlinghurst, where he excelled academically and at sport, completing his studies at the age of 16. Too young for university, he began a cadetship in journalism, but later enrolled in medicine at the University of Sydney to pursue his interest in health issues.

After graduation in 1937, Cyril began his residency at St Vincent’s Hospital, where he later became Medical Superintendent. It was there that he met Eileen, a nurse, whom he later married.

In 1939, Cyril joined the Royal Australian Air Force and rose to the rank of Wing Commander in charge of the No. 3 RAAF Hospital. While holding an administrative position in New Guinea during the war, he was often called upon to give anaesthesia during busy surgical periods.

After the war, he worked for 3 years in a specialist practice in occupational health and was also a consultant in industrial medicine to the Department of Post-War Reconstruction before completing a Diploma of Public Health at the University of Sydney.

In 1950, Cyril became Director of Industrial Hygiene at the Department of Public Health, where he was later promoted to the positions of Deputy Director of Public Health and Director General of Public Health.

Cyril was passionate about his work and had a tremendous ability to organise and influence committees. His keen interest in mental health led him to take on the position of Director General of State Psychiatric Services in 1961, in addition to his role as Director General of Public Health.

Cyril also held appointments in a number of healthcare organisations, including the World Health Organization, the Nurses Registration Board and the Board of Health, and acted as Commissioner under the Venerable Diseases Act.

Cyril produced more than 25 publications spanning a range of health-related issues, including mental health, aged care and infectious diseases. His article outlining the history of the Colonial Medical Service in NSW has been recognised as a valuable public resource and is now available on the NSW Health website (www.health.nsw.gov.au/history/med_admin).

Cyril retired at the age of 60 to spend time with his family and to follow his great interest in horse-racing. Sadly, Eileen died in 1992, and some 6 years later Cyril moved to the Central Coast to be nearer his daughter and grandchildren. He died peacefully in his Woy Woy home on 19 July 2003.

Kimberley Moore

Pierre ("Peter") Joseph Victor Beumont
AM, MB ChB, MSc, MPhil, FRCP, FRCPsych, FRACP, FRANZCP, DPM

PSYCHIATRY AND THE SPECIALISED FIELD of eating disorders lost one of its most respected practitioners at the end of 2003 with the death of Pierre ("Peter") Beumont.

Peter was a world-renowned psychiatrist, an innovative educator, a brilliant scientist and author, and a larger-than-life role model to his colleagues. He was one of the foremost authorities in the field of eating disorders, identifying early in his research that anorexia was a psychological disorder, not an endocrinological one. He was the first scientist to classify anorexia nervosa into clearly identifiable subtypes. This work still forms the basis for the classification of eating disorders today.

Peter was born in South Africa in 1937. He was educated there and in the United Kingdom. He lectured at Merton College, Oxford, before returning to South Africa in 1971 to become Acting Head of Psychiatry at Groote Schuur Hospital and the University of Cape Town. During this time he was adviser on medical matters to Mrs Helen Suzman, the sole Member of Parliament for the anti-apartheid Progressive Party.

He settled in Australia in 1975 when he took up the position of Professor and Head of Psychological Medicine at the University of Sydney. He is credited with creating a strong and integrated department with eclectic interests and excellence in teaching, research, clinical work and work in the community.

Peter was a gifted teacher, and generations of medical students benefited from his encyclopaedic knowledge of psychiatry and medicine, as well as philosophy, religious studies, ancient and modern history, the arts, and his special love — Egyptology.

In 1975, he founded New South Wales’ first specialist unit for anorexia nervosa, at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, and remained as its Director until illness forced him to retire. He was a tireless campaigner for better treatment facilities for patients with eating disorders and a devoted clinician who provided exemplary care for his patients. He also trained many of the specialists who now practise in this area.

Peter was awarded the Gaskell Gold Medal and Prize by the Royal College of Psychiatrists (in 1975) and the Max Planck Prize by the Humboldt Foundation (in 1995) for his work in psychosomatic medicine. In 2001, he was made a Member of the Order of Australia.

Peter is survived by his wife Daphne, his three daughters and their extended families.

Stephen W Touyz