

Raymond Herbert Kernutt

MBBS, MS, FRCS, FRACS

RAY KERNUTT was born on 2 September 1926 in the small town of Wagin, south of Perth. At the age of 10, he won a scholarship to attend a prestigious school in Perth, but went instead to a public school at Albany, where his sister at boarding school was able to look after him. After matriculation, he studied science at Perth University before winning a scholarship to study medicine at the University of Melbourne. He graduated with honours in 1949.

Over the next few years, Ray gained his Master of Surgery and Fellowship of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons while working as a Hospital Medical Officer at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. He gained his Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons in London in 1955, but cut short his postgraduate position as Surgical Registrar to return to Australia. In 1956, he was appointed founding Senior Surgeon at the new surgical unit at Box Hill Hospital, Melbourne, a position he held until retirement.

Ray was no stranger to rural surgery. Having attained a commercial pilots licence in 1963, he offered a surgical service to doctors in Apollo Bay and Tocumwal. He was also absorbed in breeding cattle on his 200 acre farming property at Whittlesea.

On retirement from public hospital surgery and a busy private practice, Ray became bored with a life of relaxing and playing golf



and was drawn to the prospect of rural general practice. He joined a practice in the small town of Cohuna, and, although by then in his 70s, diligently revived his medical skills to become knowledgeable about diabetes, hypertension and respiratory medicine. His undiminished skill, judgement and speed in surgery were also much valued by his colleagues.

Ray also came out of retirement on several occasions to provide lengthy locums at other locations where there was an acute shortage of doctors (eg, Christmas Island, Nauru and Castlemaine). It was fitting that he served his last active service in Cohuna before reluctantly retiring due to ill health and failing eyesight.

Ray was set apart from his colleagues, not only because of his superb technique and speed — a “surgeon’s surgeon” — but also as a dedicated rural GP. In 2002, he was presented with the first Honorary Fellowship of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

His last illness was short and unexpected, following complications of vascular investigations. He died on 27 September 2004, and is survived by his second wife, Jillian, and children Graeme, David, Gillian, Paul and Jonathon.

Peter W Graham