

Professor Roberta Barkworth Shepherd

The honorary degree of Doctor of Health Sciences was conferred upon Roberta Shepherd by the Chancellor, Ms Belinda Hutchinson AM at a Faculty of Health Sciences graduation at 11.30am on 1 April 2016.

Citation

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present Professor Roberta Barkworth Shepherd to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Health Sciences (honoris causa).

Roberta graduated with a Diploma of Physiotherapy in 1956 having completed studies in anatomy, physiology, histology and physics at the University of Sydney. Following seven years of clinical practice both in Australia and internationally, Roberta took up a teaching position at the School of Physiotherapy. Both individually and with her long-time collaborator, Janet Carr (recently deceased), Roberta led the scholarly development of the profession, particularly in paediatric and neurological physiotherapy for more than 50 years.

Roberta challenged long-held, unsubstantiated assumptions underlying physiotherapy practice. Her work was truly visionary, was widely disseminated and quickly became world best practice. She drove the paradigm shift from opinion-based to evidence-based practice which contributed to improved health outcomes for patients, particularly for children with neurological conditions and people after stroke. In 1977, Roberta was one of the first physiotherapists to become a fellow of the Australian College of Physiotherapists, and took a leading role in the academy for many years.

Being a pioneer in her field, Roberta was constantly confronted by being the first to undertake challenging projects. She was the sole author of the first, and ground-breaking, paediatrics textbook for physiotherapists in 1974 (revised 1980, 1995).

She recognised that leading change in teaching, research and rehabilitation required taking on the challenge of extending her academic qualifications. So, nearly 30 years after completing her Diploma of Physiotherapy, she was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship in 1986 and chose to study with renowned movement scientist, Professor Ann Gentile at Columbia University in New York. She was awarded three degrees (Master of Arts in 1986; Master of Education in 1988; and Doctor of Education in 1991). Roberta, as always, converted a challenge into an opportunity, and collaborated with Professors Janet Carr and Ann Gentile to produce the landmark text *Movement Science – Foundations for Physical Therapy in Rehabilitation* published in 1987 (revised in 2000).

Between 1974 and 2014, Roberta and Janet published a total of 8 world leading textbooks. Roberta's most recent contribution is her 2014 edited text *Cerebral Palsy in Infancy: Targeted Activity to Optimize Early Growth & Development* – this included chapters by renowned clinicians and scientists from Australia, France, Italy, Saudi Arabia, UK and USA. These books have been translated into many European and Asian and languages including Greek, Portuguese, German, Korean, Chinese and Japanese, as well as Farsi. These books have had an impact not only on the physiotherapy profession, but more broadly in health. In addition, Roberta has published over 60 articles in journals of many different disciplines as well as numerous book chapters. Their work is frequently cited in journals and textbooks as the 'gold standard' in rehabilitation. In October 1991, when the Cumberland College of Health Sciences was established as the Faculty of Health Sciences as part of the University of Sydney, Roberta was appointed as our first Professor and Foundation Chair of Physiotherapy. In 1994 Roberta and Janet were awarded a joint Rockefeller scholarship for study at the Rockefeller study centre on Lake Como and in 1999 an Australia-China Council Grant to fund a workshop for Peking Medical University.

Roberta (together with Janet) educated generations of students and clinicians world-wide. Roberta has been an inspirational role model for students - undergraduate, graduate and research students - and physiotherapists in both clinical practice and in academia.

Even today, Roberta continues to mentor research students and early career researchers. She continues to publish, speak at conferences, run workshops and develop new research collaborations. Her work will continue to inspire future generations.

Roberta's leadership and tireless contributions have been recognised by the physiotherapy profession. She and Janet were recently named as Honoured Members of the Australian Physiotherapy Association in 2014, the highest honour within the profession for their lifetime's work. Roberta was honoured by the Faculty in

2014, with an Alumni Award, and this year, will be presented with the University's Alumni Award for Professional Achievement.

Chancellor, I present Professor Roberta Barkworth Shepherd for admission to the degree of Doctor of Health Sciences (honoris causa) and I invite you to confer the degree upon her.