

Ms Patricia Ritchie AM

The title of Honorary Fellow of the University of Sydney was awarded posthumously to Mrs Patricia Ritchie AM by the Chancellor Ms Belinda Hutchinson AM at the Medicine ceremony held at 11.30am on 10 May 2013. The award was accepted by her daughters Julia and Ruth.

Citation

Chancellor, I have much pleasure in presenting for the posthumous award of Honorary Fellow – the late Mrs Patricia Ritchie AM, for her sustained contributions to promotion and facilitation of the academic purposes of the Sydney Medical School.

The award of Honorary Fellow today will be accepted by her daughters Julia and Ruth.

Mrs Ritchie, a journalist and manager by background, became a donor to support the activities of the Mater Hospital North Sydney through the Friends of the Mater Foundation in 2002. At that time the Department of Cancer Medicine had begun a clinical trials programme and was involved in developing clinical placements for Sydney medical student teaching.

These academic activities were poorly housed and coordinated however, and difficult to fund in a private setting. Mrs Ritchie was inspired by the possibility of creating a unique patient care facility with capacity for teaching and research, and donated funds for the purchase and refurbishment of space to form the first “Patricia Ritchie Centre” in 2003.

The growth of the clinical trials program, and the enthusiasm of students to have clinical placements at the Mater meant that the unit outgrew these facilities, and in 2011 with Mrs Ritchie’s support moved to a larger heritage building, opened by the Governor Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir in February 2011. The new facility allows improved multidisciplinary research and teaching facilities and space for students to make a home during their placements.

Mrs Ritchie’s contributions to the academic activities of the University have been much more than “bricks and mortar” however. Recognising the key role that continuity of senior research staff have in running a clinical trials program, her donations since 2003 have funded a key research manager position. Contributions to high profile international trials changed practice in breast cancer management, saving many lives globally.

Additional funding was allocated for a PhD scholarship in Psycho-oncology which was taken up by Dr Rhea Stein, who explored communication about end of life care planning. Medical students have been able to undertake honours projects in the centre in collaboration with the Pam McLean Centre, leading to the development of new communication training workshops.

A second PhD student Dr Melanie Lovell produced and tested resources to assist patients and carers in managing cancer pain. Her research implementing cancer pain management guidelines is currently supported by a further donation from Mrs Ritchie. In 2006 it was recognised that leadership of this burgeoning enterprise would be facilitated by an academic appointment for a Director. Mrs Ritchie has funded this half time position awarded to Dr Fran Boyle, who has been recently promoted to Professor of Medical Oncology.

The success of this model of academic activity in a not-for-profit private hospital associated with the University has inspired other donors through The Friends of the Mater Foundation. An anonymous donor funds the half time role of Associate Professor of Surgical Oncology, which allows a multidisciplinary approach to medical student teaching and clinical trials research. Mr Greg Poche was similarly inspired by Mrs Ritchie to donate funds for the rehousing and expansion of the Sydney Melanoma Unit to the Mater, now known as the Melanoma Institute of Australia.

At the Pain Management and Research Institute at Royal North Shore Hospital, Mrs Ritchie funded an academic appointment for Dr Paul Wrigley as a senior lecturer for 4 years. Paul’s work in pain mechanisms after spinal cord injury is internationally important and has led to significant publications during his appointment. He has an ongoing role in teaching and patient care at the PMRI.

Throughout this time Mrs Ritchie was generous with her time and wisdom, energetically solving potential road blocks with a unique blend of humour and directness. She had at all times the big picture in view, improving the health of Australians, and a sense of how our local activities contribute to this end. She was awarded Membership of the Order of Australia in 2009 for her contributions to health care, medical education and research as a philanthropist. She has been supported in this endeavour by her family, who have continued to support the University and the Mater. Although Mrs Ritchie died in September 2012, she was aware and honoured by the University’s offer of Honorary Fellowship.

Chancellor, I invite you to confer the posthumous title of Honorary Fellow of the University upon Mrs Patricia Ritchie AM and ask that her daughters Julia and Ruth accept this award on her behalf.