

AGENDA ITEM 1.8 OBITUARY

MR HOWIE KEITH FORBES WILSON GENERAL AND PLASTIC SURGEON 4 NOVEMBER 1930 – 28 APRIL 2021

Keith grew up in Sarsfield Street, Herne Bay, Auckland and attended the local primary school, in Curran Street, then King Preparatory School in Remuera. He had an early introduction to sailing which became a lasting passion. Starting at Auckland Grammar in 1944 he showed his promise as a scholar in the A forms and 6 Science. In his final year, 1948, he played in the rugby First 15, and was appointed a school prefect.

In 1949 Keith was accepted into Otago University Medical School and began his studies in Dunedin, living in Knox College throughout his student years. On 9 December 1954 he was capped MB ChB and commenced work as a House Surgeon in Auckland in the New Year. His first 3 months were at the Thames Hospital working for Mr. K Archer in General Surgery, followed by General Surgery at Middlemore with Mr. J M Clarke, then Eyes, and ENT at Auckland Hospital. In 1956 he completed a further General Surgery run with Mr. F P Furkert, and Orthopaedic Surgery at Middlemore with Mr. W J B McFarland. He gained full registration on the Commonwealth list June 1957, with a clear indication that the path ahead led to specialising in surgery.

It was while working in Auckland that he met and fell in love with Barbara, who was nursing, and they married. Barbara was a huge support to Keith as his very busy life developed, with 3 children, much travel, a frantic surgical practice, College of Surgeons commitments, sailing and collecting antique furniture.

For 5 years, in the '50s, Keith studied in London and Edinburgh obtaining his FRCS and FRCSE and returned to New Zealand to take up the position of Surgical Registrar at Waikato Hospital in November 1961. He was admitted to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons on 21 June 1962. Patrick Beehan was his House Surgeon in 1962, with general surgeons Geoffrey Wynn-Jones, Ellis Dick, Archie Badger, and Allan Lomas. Subsequently, both Keith and Patrick were to establish a successful Plastic Surgical Unit at the Waikato Hospital.

Keith took over Allan Lomas's hospital and private practice when Allan left to train in Radiotherapy in London. The Wilson family house-minded the lovely Lomas home on the lake below Waikato Hospital. They later built their own place nearby, so handy to the hospital, a home well known for its hospitality. In the late 1960s Keith became interested in the new discipline of Plastic Surgery. When Pat Beehan returned from overseas, and Middlemore Hospital in 1971, to a fulltime appointment in Plastic Surgery at Waikato, Keith was able to spend 9 months visiting plastic surgery units in USA, Canada, UK and Thailand. To complete his training Keith spent 1973 at the Middlemore Hospital Plastic Surgery unit under William Manchester.

With the Waikato Hospital Plastic Surgery Unit established in Ward 7, Helen Fahey became charge nurse, and with two well trained surgeons the specialty of Plastic Surgery took off. They shared responsibilities for both elective and acute cases until the mid 80s. A one in two roster was not uncommon at Waikato Hospital at that time as the various specialty units were being established. However, they were reinforced when Peter Widdowson was appointed and later Stewart McNichol and Michael Klaassen. The unit was then recognised as a College training post for Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery.

In his public hospital practice, Keith was a General Plastic Surgeon with a special interest in hypospadias, hand surgery and he made a major contribution to the treatment of burns. He became member of the US Hand Surgery Club. Keith had a very successful private practice in both Plastic and General Surgery, and he never really gave up his General Surgery until the advent of minimally invasive surgery. A cholecystectomy or open prostatectomy would be on his lists much to the chagrin of his General Surgical colleagues. He was one of the last truly General Surgeons.

Keith had a significant role in the development of Braemar Hospital in Hamilton where he worked as a busy surgeon on a regular basis and was involved in the Hospital Management and also the Braemar Charitable Trust on which he served as chairman for many years. During the period of fundamental reforms in medical practice in New Zealand with vocational registration, loss of medical leadership in the public hospitals, and formation of the Senior Hospital Doctors Union (ASMS), Keith became involved in medical politics. He was elected to the New Zealand Committee of the RACS and was elected chairman 1986-1988. Following this he became a member, then became chairman, of the Hospital Officers Medical Advisory Committee (HOMAC) of the New Zealand Medical Association. HOMAC was responsible for the negotiation of the terms of employment and salaries of senior hospital doctors with the Higher Salaries Commission until government implemented the change to negotiation through the adversarial union system. A busy time for Keith which he handled with great aplomb, and with the assistance of his wife Barbara.

Yachting remained an important part of Keith's and his family's life. Armed with his Yacht Master's certificate he confidently sailed the Hauraki Gulf and to the Bay of Islands where he had an interest in Moturoa Island. His wooden Davidson 1975 ketch RIADA was frequently seen in the Christmas Tall Ships Race in the Bay of Islands receiving line honours on several occasions.

With his retirement he shifted to Devonport and assisted at the Naval Base with minor surgery.

Unfortunately, his last years were blighted by Parkinson's Disease which he bore with great courage and equanimity. His mentorship of junior colleagues, and his jovial disposition and chuckle, which remained with him to the end, will be fondly remembered by many.

Keith is survived by his wife Barbara and three children, Carolin, Nicola and Jonathon, along with seven grandchildren.

This obituary was provided by Keith's family, Ross Blair FRACS and Patrick Beehan FRACS.