

## OBITUARY

**DR ERROL PADDEY JOHN KING MB BCH, FRCS (ED), FRACS  
GENERAL SURGEON  
9TH OCTOBER 1927 – 26TH MARCH 2024**



Paddey was born in East London, Cape Province, South Africa and moved to the small town of Springs near Johannesburg when he started high school. He was named Paddey after his mother's maiden name.

His father Artie was a health inspector who served in World War 2 in North Africa and Italy with the engineers with duties including testing and treating water supplies and defusing mines. On his return to South Africa at the end of the war, like many returning veterans, Artie was offered a place at university and he chose to pass this offer on to his son Paddey.

Paddey graduated from Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg in 1951 having worked as a clothing salesman and then as an orderly in a Mines hospital to put himself through University.

He did his internship at Baragwanath Hospital. This was during the time of apartheid and the hospital was only for "blacks and coloureds" flanked by the sprawling shanty town of Soweto. He described being well looked after at "Bara" with nutritious meals and pleasant quarters, but the workload was "sheer hell". Most of the work was trauma – stab wounds, gun-shot wounds and head wounds from "knobkerries" and consultants were never seen after hours. Back then he found Baragwanath a "butcher shop", resented the hours and lack of training and couldn't get away quickly enough.

He was not dissuaded from a career in surgery and in 1953 he went to the Edinburgh to obtain a fellowship. Later that year his fiancée, Marjorie Tennant whom he had met when he was a student and she a nursing student, joined him and they were married on 17<sup>th</sup> July. While working at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary he had a role teaching anatomy and successfully passed the primary in May 1954.

During his time in Edinburgh, he worked at the Princess Margaret Rose Hospital – a purely orthopaedic hospital catering for chronic diseases such as TB and polio. He found this job particularly enjoyable and for a time considered doing orthopaedics, but then was offered a job at the Western General Hospital where he worked for highly regarded surgeons of the time - Sir James Learmouth and Sir John Bruce and was exposed to major general surgery including Whipple's procedures, adrenalectomy, thyroidectomy and total colectomy – remembering this is the 1950s. Under such tutelage in January 1956, he passed the FRCS exam and now with 2 children he returned to South Africa for family reasons.

He and Marjorie became increasingly unhappy watching the deepening inequality and brutality that was apartheid. Black people were moved to their "homelands", even though they had never lived there, homes were bulldozed, police who shot blacks were considered heroes and then the Prime Minister was assassinated. By January 1961, they felt they could no longer live there and moved back to the UK, working in London. Having met some Australians, they decided Australia was a young country of opportunity and became "10 pound poms", paying 10 pounds to Australia House to emigrate. He heard of a senior registrar job at the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) and he and his young family now with 3 small children left by boat in September 1962 for Australia, where they had never set foot and he had no guaranteed work.

The night before they reached Port Adelaide a child on board the ship developed an intussusception and he performed a laparotomy without resection (the only treatment available at the time) on the rocky boat with the ships doctor giving the anaesthetic. This story hit the Adelaide papers and was the perfect prelude to a successful

interview. At the QEH he worked for Prof Jepson and Ag Campbell with junior consultants Bill Proudman, Jim Harris and other registrars Colin Paull and Jim Mill. He remembered being treated with great kindness and as an outsider felt welcomed, although he described Adelaide as a boring place at that time – he remembered inviting Bill Proudman out for a beer after work, only to be told that pubs all shut at 6pm.

All public work in those days was honorary and surgeons gained an income purely from private practice. As an immigrant, he thought he would starve trying to compete with the locals in the city and decided to move to the new hospital in the north - the Lyell McEwin where he started work in 1963 as the only local general surgeon providing a regular service to the hospital and that same year passed the FRACS. At that stage the Lyell McEwin had a single general surgical ward, an obstetrics ward, a “casualty” run by local GP’s and an x-ray department run by Bill Benson. Jim Mill joined soon after and the hospital grew through the 1960’s gaining 2 medical wards, a gynaecology ward and paediatric ward. They built large private rooms across the road, called ESMEC House (Elizabeth and Salisbury Medical Centre), for the increasing number of specialists – now the site of a multi-storey car-park.

In the 1970’s he and colleagues opened negotiations with the Hospitals Corporation of America about building a private hospital in the area. Jim Mill found land on the edge of Salisbury, they drew up plans with an architect, got council approval and sealed the deal with a handshake after dinner at the Old Spot Hotel on Main North Road. Marjorie came up with the name – Central Districts Private Hospital, named after the SANFL Club. Paddey became the Chair of the Board and one of the wards was named after him.

Throughout the 1970’s there were repeated upheavals in employment conditions as the workforce transitioned from honoraries ultimately towards Medicare and this was particularly difficult in a community hospital. Then in the early 1980’s the Lyell McEwin decided to appoint specialists on a sessional basis, similar to the Royal Adelaide (RAH), ceasing to be a community hospital, for the first time becoming a public hospital with organised departments. Paddey became the first Head of Surgery at the Lyell McEwin Hospital and Chair of the Heads of Units Committee. Jimmy Lee was appointed as a full-time surgeon and visiting surgeons Jim Mill, Roger Jansen, Paul Leong and Adrian Burke were appointed. Paddey was instrumental in turning the Lyell McEwin into a teaching hospital. Under his leadership they sought and gained accreditation through RACS to begin training registrars on rotation from the RAH and Paddey became part of the SA general surgical registrar appointments committee. A Medical Staff Society was formed and he was the first Chair of that body, which also gave him a seat on the hospital Board. He eagerly assisted and supported Dr Rupert MacArthur in establishing an anaesthetic department.

Paddey resigned as Head of Unit at the age of 60, feeling that a younger surgeon should take over (his concern being the ongoing development of the unit over any personal ambition), but he continued to advocate for increasing the level of services by attracting an intensivist in 1991 and then an orthopaedic surgeon and registrar. When registrars and fellows came, near the end of his career, he thoroughly enjoyed working with and teaching them. He retired in 1993 at the age of 65.

Although his scope of practice narrowed over the years and no longer included things like fixing fractures or removing ureteric stones, he remained a general surgeon throughout. Instead, he had a vision to continue to expand the Lyell McEwin Hospital such that it had all surgical specialties and could become a fully-fledged, stand-alone major teaching hospital. He would be amazed to see what the hospital has become today, but I suspect would still be advocating for increased beds and more surgical specialties.

Remembering his time at Bara where the consultants were never seen after hours, he worked through most of his career without junior medical staff or an intensive care, providing a personalised consultant led service to his patients. He truly embodied the concept of patient-centred care, treating uninsured patients for free, with no junior staff in the honorary era and never charged a gap for surgery at any time in his career.

He took the Hippocratic Oath and his duty as a doctor and surgeon very seriously and was always ready to fight for what he believed in, sometimes against what he regarded as the Adelaide establishment. When roused by a sense of injustice, especially if it related to perceived inadequate services for his patients, he became a powerful and tireless advocate on their behalf and was never afraid to speak up or call out bad behaviour or poor judgement, although tact was not always his strong point. He would see such instances as a duty and he did not shirk from it.

He enjoyed holidaying and fishing, usually camping by the Murray on the Riverland with friends and family and later in life built and maintained a house in Middleton which they greatly enjoyed and he was a keen gardener. He was known by his many friends as quite the raconteur. Sadly, the last few years of his life were alone after Marjorie died in 2021. He passed away peacefully on 26<sup>th</sup> March at the age of 96. He is survived by his 4 children – Peter, Susan, John and David, 11 grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren.

In loving memory,  
Dr David King FRACS

*This obituary was supplied by Dr David King FRACS, Vascular Surgeon*