

Obituary

Dr John Ellard AM (1924-2011)

Dr John Ellard, an eminent and very influential psychiatrist and the former long serving editor of *Modern Medicine*, now called *Medicine Today*, died quietly on 28 August 2011, just eight days after his beloved wife, Joan. John achieved much in many fields. Everything he did seemed to happen effortlessly. But he achieved so much because of a combination of shrewd analysis, great charm, mordant wit and an ability to always express himself directly and simply. John used his considerable wit with rare skill, and his wicked sense of humour often helped him get through difficult situations. When all seemed lost and irretrievable he would often say – ‘well remember, there’s always the grog’. There was more than an element of Buddhist worldly detachment in his complex personality. The uncommon quality of commonsense was always there.



For several decades John was regarded as one of the leaders of psychiatry in Australia and during that time he improved community respect for the practice of psychiatry in Australia. The Northside Clinic in Greenwich, NSW, was the creation for which he was probably best known. He built the Northside Clinic from scratch in 1973 and remained at the helm for three decades. This clinic provided high quality psychiatric in-hospital and continuing care from a unique joint practice encompassing virtually all of the subspecialties of psychiatry. John set a standard for private psychiatric hospitals that had never been reached before nor has been reached by many since. Few Australian psychiatrists – whether academics or clinicians – were uninfluenced by his thoughtful and, at times, provocative views.

John began his career as a psychologist before studying medicine and then specialising in psychiatry. He received many awards and medals, including a Reserve Forces Decoration and the Medal of Honour of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP), and was bestowed as a Member of the Order of Australia in 1983. After upheavals in the NSW Corrections System had led to a Royal Commission in the 1970s, he was appointed a Commissioner of the NSW Department of Corrective Services in 1979 and continued pressing for reform from within until his Commission

ended in 1987. For two decades from 1962 he was Chair of the Law Foundation of NSW, attempting to build much needed bridges between the disciplines of law and medicine.

For many years John was extensively involved in efforts to improve the quality of psychiatric care through the RANZCP. He was actively involved in responses to several serious breakdowns of psychiatric practice standards in Australia. He was one of the few doctors who made sure that the deep sleep abuses of Chelmsford Hospital were properly investigated. John was also very involved in the response to other abuses of psychiatry, such as psycho-

surgery and the official response to the problems at Ward 10B in Townsville Hospital. He remained a strong supporter of (Professor) Merrilyn Walton when she was the NSW Health Care Complaints Commissioner and often under siege. Although generally liberal, John campaigned vigorously against doctors having sexual relationships with their patients, regarding this as an indefensible abuse of power.

John edited *Modern Medicine*, and subsequently *Medicine Today*, for over 20 years (1978 to 2002). The journal has a broad reach within the Australian medical profession, especially among general practitioners, and his editorship enabled John to extend his influence in his many areas of interest. He wrote extensively, both in the journal’s pages and elsewhere, often about areas of medicine that were troubling and controversial. His writing was always succinct and elegant, often droll, and invariably carefully weighed the benefits and costs of all options. John could always be counted on to come to his own conclusions, whatever the conventional wisdom was on the subject. As a supporter of euthanasia he provided evidence in Darwin in 1996 on an applicant, ultimately successful, for legal euthanasia. He was also a very early and strong supporter of substantial drug law reform.

John is survived by his children Katherine, Andrew, Matthew and Thomas.

DR ALEX WODAK AM

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