

OBITUARY

Vale Kevin Walsh, 1925–2017

Australasian Society for the Study of Brain Impairment (ASSBI) is deeply saddened by the death of Dr Kevin Walsh, at the age of 92, on 4 December 2017. Kevin has been one of the grandfathers of clinical neuropsychology and was the founder of ASSBI. After serving in the RAAF, he completed a medical degree in 1951 and went straight on to pursue his interest in the study of psychology, by completing Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Whilst assisting in psychosurgery, Kevin wrote his Master's thesis on the assessment of the effects of frontal lobe dysfunction, based on his studies of patients undergoing frontal leucotomies in the 1950s, a truly seminal work in elucidating frontal lobe functions. In 1961, he joined the Department of Psychology at the University of Melbourne. He taught neuropsychology and, forging a close collaboration with neurologist, Dr Peter Bladin, he established the first neuropsychology clinic at the Austin Hospital in Melbourne in 1974.

Kevin published his first book "Neuropsychology – A Clinical Approach" in 1978, which is now in its fifth edition and forged his international reputation. The same year he founded the first training programme in clinical neuropsychology at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Following the neurological tradition, he taught a syndrome-oriented approach to neuropsychology, informed by an understanding of neuroanatomy, neurological and neuropsychological syndromes and psychometrics. Above all, he taught his students to listen to and observe the patient, talk to the family and to think logically, referring to the words of Peter Bladin, who said neuropsychology was 'a body-contact sport'. Australia is, as a consequence of Kevin's influence, a mecca for neuropsychology training, having six doctoral- and master-level training programmes. In the 1970s, Kevin forged close friendships with various eminent neuropsychologists internationally, including Muriel Lezak, Edith Kaplan, Andrew Kertesz, Oliver Zangwill and Jacques Barbizet. Kevin also developed an early association with the International Neuropsychological Society, attending many of its conferences.

Kevin was the founding President of the ASSBI in 1978, believing passionately in the need for

multidisciplinary study of all forms of brain impairment in order to facilitate their understanding and optimal management. Together with Dr Peter Bladin and Professor Gordon Stanley, he hosted the first Brain Impairment Workshop at the Austin Hospital in Melbourne in 1976, at which Kevin gave the opening address entitled 'The Nature of Modern Neuropsychology'. He eschewed the concept of a single construct of organic brain damage being advocated by clinical psychologists in the United States of the time. Rather, he identified with the studies by neurologists based on missile wounds from the Second World War, including Han Leukas Teuber, Brenda Milner and Aleksandr Luria. From these neurologists, he had learned and applied the concept of the neuropsychological syndrome. Kevin had an abiding awareness of specific syndromes, particularly the frontal lobe syndrome. In 1978, the ASSBI was founded by Kevin and Professor Gordon Stanley, with Kevin as the inaugural president. ASSBI has held conferences annually ever since and has also co-hosted several INS (International Neuropsychological Society) conferences in Australia and New Zealand. In 1995, Kevin was awarded Honorary Membership of INS in recognition of his contribution to Neuropsychology and in 2013 received an INS Distinguished Career Award. In 1991, the year of his retirement, Kevin was awarded the honour of Officer of the Order of Australia. He continued to mentor students in the doctoral programme at Monash University over a number of years, providing gifts or prizes that were the fruit of his woodworking labours – his other passion. Kevin spent his retirement living in his family home in Ivanhoe, which he had shared with his late wife Pat, with whom he had six children and many grandchildren.

In this opening address at the 1978 Brain Impairment Workshop, Kevin emphasised the importance of understanding the emotional and psychiatric consequences of brain impairment, of disciplines working together, bringing various perspectives to better understand neurological disorders, of providing rehabilitation and conducting research to inform clinical practice. Kevin concluded this address with these words:

..May I hope that if it does nothing else this conference will produce dissatisfaction –
Dissatisfaction about what we are doing for the brain impaired child and adult;
Dissatisfaction for the lack of training we are giving to those concerned with their management;
Dissatisfaction that will lead to meetings that will allow us to tackle specific problems in the future with some measure of success.

May Kevin's words continue to inspire the success of ASSBI. He has been an inspiration to a generation of clinical neuropsychologists and other allied health professionals who continue to work towards improving the lives of people with brain impairment.

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