

Feature News

Australia Day Honours

*The Australian of the Year Awards proved to be a momentous occasion in the eye care sector. The awardees were announced in Canberra on 25 January which included **Prof Peter McCluskey** (Officer AO in the General Division) for his distinguished service to ophthalmology, medical education, eye health organisations and to the community; **Dr David Workman** (Medal OAM in the General Division) for his service to ophthalmology and international relations; **Dr Indy Singh** (Medal OAM in the General Division) for his service to the international community through eye care programs and Australian of the Year 2020, **Dr James Muecke AM** for his outstanding work in blindness prevention.*

We caught up with James, David and Peter to talk about their awards, ophthalmic work and what they plan to do in the future.

2020 Australian of the Year

Dr James Muecke



“I am inspired by positivity, the selfless and generous donation of time and expertise from my Aussie and Kiwi colleagues, and the willingness of our ophthalmic colleagues in poorer countries to learn, to enhance our profession, and to improve the sight and lives of their own people.”

What achievements in your career are you most proud of? The Australian of the Year (AOTY) Award is an absolute highlight of course. However, obtaining enough marks to enter medical school (but not enough for Sydney University where I had hoped to study) changed the course of my life forever. The comprehensive and sustainable work we are doing with Sight For All which is impacting on over one million people each year is undoubtedly the crowning achievement of my medical career.

What are you working on currently? To date, we have undertaken projects in nine low income countries in Asia. However, we are now commencing educational projects in Africa, drawing on expertise out of the UK and Europe.

What do you want to focus on for the future? For the next year (and beyond) I want to work with the Australian Government and continue to raise awareness of the blinding complications of diabetes which is a growing problem in our own communities.

Who is inspiring you – whether within ophthalmology or in a broader sense? I am inspired by positivity, the selfless and generous donation of time and expertise from my Aussie and Kiwi colleagues, and the willingness of our ophthalmic colleagues in poorer countries to learn, to enhance our profession, and to improve the sight and lives of their own people.

How did you celebrate upon winning this special award? After the photos and interviews had settled, I went back to the hotel with my family, old school friends and other award recipients to celebrate through the night. I only had two hours sleep (a grand total of four over 48 hours), before having to rise at 4:30am for an intense three-hour media call out. After attending the flag raising ceremony by Lake Burley Griffin later that morning, my family and I headed to Sydney with my fellow recipients to be a part of the stunning Australia Day celebrations at Circular Quay.

Medal (OAM) – General Division

Dr David Workman



“I was humbled to receive so many messages of congratulations. I can't say I thought I was doing anything special. Being so lucky, we should all give back something.”

What achievements in your career are you most proud of? I am lucky to have had the opportunity to become an ophthalmologist with the reward of seeing the changes that can be made in people's lives. Over 30 years in private practice has been very professionally rewarding but has also given me the flexibility to become involved in a diverse range of activities.

I have had various roles in the College (in both training and politics) and over 20 years at the RVEEH including Chair of the Senior Medical Staff and Head of two clinics. Mark Ellis also invited me to join the Sumba Eye Program on its inception and I have been involved ever since. I have also been involved in Aviation Medicine which has brought contact with both civil and military pilots. All of these have enabled me to meet interesting and stimulating people. One of the things of which I am especially proud, is when I am contacted to request my input into something, whether it be College, hospital, aviation or government.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the relationships with my patients. Now that I am approaching the end of my career, many of them are asking me to stay on to "see them out"! I like people and I enjoyed chatting to them. Often, this chatting is crucial to identifying their concerns and addressing them so that the patient feels like they have been heard.

What are you working on currently? I am reassessing where I want to go in the next few years. I am young enough that I still have something to offer, and I am keen to do that. At the same time, I think it is reasonable to look for something a little different to do. Obviously, what skills I have lie in ophthalmology and it would be logical to utilise these. To this end, I am reducing the work I do in private with a view to finding a different area to work in.

What do you want to focus on for the future? I have been in private practice for over 30 years. This has enabled me to have the flexibility to travel overseas and do the other extra-curricular things that came along. Now is the time to look for other things. I enjoy volunteer work and