

Harold Keith McComb

1924 - 2012



Harold Keith McComb, a gifted plastic surgeon and Founding Member of the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons was renowned for his technical brilliance and innovation and a source of inspiration. He leaves behind a legacy of surgical excellence for the craft.

Harold obtained his MBBS at the University of Melbourne in 1947. He was a Registrar in Plastic Surgery at Royal Melbourne Hospital in 1949 and Associate Assistant Surgeon in 1950. Guided by Sir Benjamin Rank, Harold developed a passion for reconstructive surgery. By 1953 his potential was recognised with a two-year scholarship for specialist training at Oxford. After three months Royal Perth Hospital offered him a consultancy in plastic surgery. As he was unable to take leave to finish his studies, his Oxford tutors accelerated his training which he finished in nine months. He obtained his Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England in 1952 and assumed the RPH consultancy in 1954. As such, he was WA's first fully trained plastic surgeon.

In 1956, Harold obtained his Fellowship of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and Fellowship of the American College of Surgeons in 1960. Harold's passion was in cleft lip and cleft palate correction. He performed countless reconstructive procedures to help children live a life free of disfigurement and stigma. He pioneered the technique of correcting nasal deformity and lip defect simultaneously. The published results led to worldwide adoption of his techniques. He achieved a similar outcome with bone grafts to fill the gap associated with cleft palates. He created the first Combined Clinic in which children with facial clefts could be examined by all relevant specialists. His innovation extended beyond surgery as he created watertight beds for bathing burns patients to eliminate risk of cross infection. His contribution to developing SSD burn cream at Princess Margaret Hospital revolutionised patient management.

Harold was a fine teacher and an examiner for the College. He was dedicated to a number of aid programs. Under the Colombo Plan, his trip to Madurai in India in 1964 initiated a long-running Interplast program that trained local medical teams in cleft repairs in Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Mauritius, Indonesia, Tuvalu, Fiji, Vietnam and Laos. Harold served as a Board Member of Interplast Australia. Harold received numerous distinctions and awards including the Distinguished Honorary Fellowship of the American Association of Plastic Surgeons; a peer-reviewed award recognising his worldwide contributions. At the time, he was one of four non-Americans so honoured. He was Founding and Honorary Member of the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons and Honorary Member of the New Zealand Association of Plastic Surgeons. In 2002 he received a WA Citizen of the Year award for his surgical work in WA and voluntary work in South-East Asia.

Harold had a longstanding illness and died on 16 August in Hollywood Private Hospital, Nedlands. He was 88. His wife predeceased him and he leaves three sons, four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Universally respected by his peers and an inspiration to all plastic surgeons, he will be missed.

Credit: *In Memoriam* www.surgeons.org/about-racs/about-the-college-of-surgeons/in-memoriam