



Patron: H.R.H. The Prince of Wales

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
Professor David Watters

23 November 2015

Prof John Wright, FRACS
1504/7 Rockwall Crescent
POTTS POINT NSW 2011

Dear Prof Wright

I refer to recent correspondence and I write to draw our related dialogue to a close. In doing so I note that you do not seek the College's assistance in relation to historical decisions. That said, it is also understood that you, in your own words, seek acknowledgement of your 'surgical worth'.

The College has endeavoured to do so in a tangible way and has gathered considerable material relating to your achievements. This letter and a number of documents will be housed on your College file from this point onwards.

At the outset, may I say that your long period of Fellowship of the College is characterised as blemish-free. Your loyalty to the College, including in your retirement, is noted and greatly appreciated. A pioneer in the highly subspecialised field of paediatric cardio-thoracic surgery, it is due to your personal commitment and dedication that many children and their parents have benefited from your skills and professional insights. Further it is noted that in the difficult terrain of public hospital administration you succeeded in establishing a highly successful surgical unit at The Prince Henry Hospital and then at The Prince of Wales Children's Hospital.

While your work in hospitals came to an end earlier than you would have prior anticipated, it is clear from the judgement of Justice Bryson of the Supreme Court of New South Wales (handed down on 4 September 1987) that this was not due to clinical shortcomings. The judgement turned on points of employment law. Indeed, the judgement refers to your high professional standing and level of responsibility as a medical practitioner. In addition, the Court had regard to a report prepared by Mr Roger Mee FRACS, who was described as uniquely well qualified to comment on the issues being considered by the hospital prior to the cessation of your hospital employment. Notably, Mr Mee's report was in your favour and he congratulated you on your handling of highly complex surgical cases. A copy of this report has been placed on your College file.

Of importance is the fact that the judgement described your surgical practice as being at the frontiers of difficulty and peril, and also referred to you as a person of high and rare qualifications. The Court went on to state that the hospital's actions were not to be taken as an adjudication on your professional career, and that

a decision to cease to employ a surgeon in work which retains some of the character of experiment and adventure passes no judgement on his general competence.

I turn now to your book, *A History of War Surgery*, published in 2011 by Amberley Publishing, a copy of which you kindly donated to the College Library. Your book is part of a collection held by the Library on military surgery, and of particular significance in this 2015 commemorative year of the ANZAC landing in Gallipoli. The book has been of interest to Fellows and well utilised since donation. A copy of the cover of the book and the internal book plate will be housed on your College file. The informative *Note on the Author* at page 283 will also be retained on your College file.

A copy of the review of your book published in the College's *Surgical News* in August 2012 will be retained on your College file. This review is a valuable tribute to both your knowledge of military surgery history and your distinguished career. I note in particular the following words at the end of the review:

John Wright has had a very distinguished career as a cardio-thoracic surgeon; the first Australian to obtain a professorial appointment in that discipline as the Foundation Head of Paediatric Cardiac Surgery at the Prince of Wales Hospital, Sydney.

Mindful of your contributions over recent years, please note that a copy of your book review of *War Surgery in Afghanistan and Iraq*, published in *Surgical News* in March 2009, and your article entitled *Sham Peer Review* published in *Surgical News* in November 2008 have also been retained on your file. It is noted that the latter article makes a relevant contribution to the on-going debate about the complexities of peer review systems.

In closing I want to highlight that it is often left unsaid that society relies on the intellect and courage of medical practitioners like yourself, and in turn the College acknowledges that you have served your community well over many years.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'David Watters', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

**Professor David Watters OBE
President**

Cc A/Prof David Hillis, CEO, RACS
 Ms Bernadine McNamara, In-house Counsel, RACS