

The Lifetime Achievement Award is made by our society, to recognize significant contributions to neuromodulation and pain medicine.

It is with great pleasure that we present a NSANZ Lifetime Achievement award for services to neuromodulation and pain management to my friend and colleague Peter George Courtney, who by his own admission became an accidental pain medicine physician.

Peter embodies the qualities of a worthy recipient. He is compassionate, works hard, thinks deeply, is a good teacher, is generous with his knowledge and has been a lifelong learner.

Peter studied medicine at Monash University, graduating in 1978. He completed anaesthetic training in 1985.

He became a Fellow the Faculty Pain Medicine ANZCA in 2003 and a Fellow Interventional Pain Practice WIP in 2005.

In Australia, he was a founding member and the first treasurer of NSANZ. He was the Australasian chairman of the World Institute of Pain and an examiner of the FIPP examination.

He told me that after completing his anaesthetic training, he did the young Australian thing of being a locum consultant anaesthetist in Plymouth and Bromsgrove Hospitals in United Kingdom for four months before obtaining an appointment as an Asst Prof in Anaesthesia at Oregon Health Sciences University, Portland. On arrival, he found that amongst his jobs, he had been nominated to run the pain clinic for the next 12 months as his predecessor had just taken 12 months leave! As a sign for the future, he was voted best teacher of the year by the trainees.

So, like many people in our generation, armed with a big textbook, a nurse, physiotherapist and psychologist, he started his lifelong learning and pain management career with a steep learning curve, with his first patient requesting a trigger point injection!

At his next job at South-Western Medical School (Parkland Hospital) Dallas, Texas, having learnt of his prowess in the Oregon pain clinic, dispatched him quarter time in their pain clinic for another period of servitude!

On return to Australia, he was deputy director of anaesthesia at Western General Hospital Melbourne, where he was involved in the expansion of the pain management from a purely post-operative service to include multidisciplinary chronic pain management.

During the 1990s he was a visiting anaesthetist and a pain doctor at Melbourne Extended Care and Rehabilitation Service, Western Hospital and in private practice.

From the early 2000's Pain Management occupied 95% of his clinical time in public and private practice. He still found time for further study of musculoskeletal medicine at Flinders University in 2002 and finished with a MMed from Newcastle University in 2005.

Due to the nature of his referrals, his practice had become more interventional. His repertoire included sympathetic blocks, radio-frequency treatment both neurotomies and pulsed, spinal cord and peripheral nerve stimulation and intrathecal drug delivery for noncancer and palliative care patients. Andrew Jefferies and Peter were instrumental in the introduction of neurostimulation for public patients at Western Hospital!

In 2010 he presented a paper on cluneal nerve stimulation entitled "Superior and middle cluneal nerves: An important target for stimulation in the treatment of failed back surgery syndrome", at the INS meeting in London. This research garnered many talks around the world as he presented and popularized the efficacy of cluneal nerve stimulation in the management of persistent back and leg pain.

In 2010, I was a fortunate recipient of his generous nature, knowledge and teaching that allowed me undertake part of my sabbatical with Peter to learn how to insert cluneal nerve stimulator leads with ultrasound guidance

Throughout his career, he has been involved with undergraduate and postgraduate teaching at home and abroad. He has been a mentor to many local and overseas doctors that will continue his work.

Some of the highlights he has seen during his career include the development of Pain Medicine as a Recognized Speciality, the introduction of point of care ultrasound, new targets that include cluneal nerve stimulation, technological improvements and different waveforms and the Australian led growth of peripheral nerve stimulation.

He still has a few bees in his bonnet:

He thinks epidural lead placement should be performed in awake patients to avoid the unrecognized disaster that can occur in anaesthetised patients.

He also thinks pain medicine specialists should not lose sight of myofascial pain and his beginnings in Portland, Oregon, where trigger point injections, acupuncture and dry needling made a significant difference to a surprisingly large number of patients.

He is concerned that trainees are not getting enough exposure to interventions in their core training to obtain comprehensive multidisciplinary learning.

Looking to the future, he would like to see a device implant registry to show that stimulation works.

I've had the absolute honor of working with Peter over the years and I am delighted to present Peter to the society for this award. Without further ado, the 2024 lifetime achievement award for services to Neuromodulation and Pain Management goes to Peter Courtney. Let's congratulate Peter in the usual fashion.