Professor Fiona Wood, AM, FAHMS (Plastic Surgeon, Western Australia)

Savio George Barreto^{1,2}

Accepted: 21 June 2021 / Published online: 3 July 2021
© Société Internationale de Chirurgie 2021

Keywords Surgeon · Innovator · Leader · Plastic surgery

Fiona Wood was born in a coal mining village in Yorkshire, England in 1958 where she lived with her parents and three siblings. She attended early schooling at Frickley and Ackworth schools. Young Fiona wanted to pursue sports and later mathematics and science. She fondly remembers that it was her mother and brother, Geoff, who encouraged her to do medicine. While a medical student at St Thomas' Hospital Medical School in London, Ms Wood, was determined to become a surgeon and pursue research. The impression made on her by the Staff (Plastic) Surgeon, Mr Brian Mayou, helped channel her interest in plastic surgery. Ms Wood's growing surgical experience and vision for innovation flourished during her time at London's Great Ormond Street Hospital. It was here that she was exposed to many forms of scarring, including old burns, which piqued her curiosity and instilled in her a lifelong dedication to burns medicine. She moved to the Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead, Sussex, where Mr Mayou worked. The Queen Victoria Hospital is known for the Guinea Pig Club, an association formed in 1941 by patients who had undergone experimental reconstructive plastic surgery during World War II for burn injuries

sustained in plane crashes. The term 'guinea pig' reflected the investigational nature of the work carried out, and the new equipment designed specifically to treat burn injuries. In 1987, Ms Wood, and husband, Tony Kierath, moved to Australia and connected with the late Harold McComb, an Internationally-renowned plastic and reconstructive surgeon. He helped provide Ms Wood perspective about how she would envision herself as a surgeon (Fig. 1).

Ms Wood completed her medical training in Australia with expertise in cleft palate and burns surgery. Mr McComb's words of wisdom helped her choose her calling at the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children and Royal Perth Hospital, in Perth. She said, "I couldn't do both (clefts and burns) and do both justice. There were others who were very talented and very able in the cleft and cranio-facial area... whereas burns was a bit more of an orphan, perhaps the underdog specialty. I had to choose." And choose, she did! Ms Wood with her scientist collaborator Marie Stoner would go on to establish the McComb Foundation in 1999 in honor of her mentor. In 2012, this was re-named the Fiona Wood Foundation. Recognizing the potential of tissue engineering technology to treat burns, in 1993, Ms Wood and Ms Stoner developed a skin culture facility with support from a Telethon Grant. Their product evolved from confluent sheets of cultural epithelial autograph (CEA) to aerosol-delivered cell-clusters and is colloquially known as "spray-on skin". This innovative skin culture technology was commercialised and is now used world-wide with FDA approval (2019).

✉ Savio George Barreto
savio.barreto@flinders.edu.au; savio.barreto@sa.gov.au

¹ Division of Surgery and Perioperative Medicine, Department of Surgery, Flinders Medical Centre, Bedford Park, SA 5042, Australia

² College of Medicine and Public Health, Flinders University, Bedford Park, SA, Australia

Fig. 1 Professor Fiona Wood at the Royal Perth Hospital

Ms Wood, named Australian of the Year in 2005, is an eternal optimist. “This is what I would like to be most proud of. I want people to understand this [the status quo] isn’t as good as it gets. You don’t have to accept what people say. You can question, you can innovate, you can actually drive things forward. This surgical leader and innovator envisions that, in the years ahead, we need to reset our goals and reimagine possibilities as we emerge from the stress incurred by the COVID-19 pandemic on our health systems. Her message to younger surgeons is that they must never forget that being a surgeon is a privilege one should never take for granted. “The responsibility we

take on to care for someone in their most vulnerable state, cannot be over-emphasized. The education and training undertaken to be a surgeon is one that involves the support of many, and as part of that privileged journey, it is our responsibility to expand the body of knowledge to ensure that we learn from today to make tomorrow better.”

Funding None.

Publisher’s Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.