



Obituary

Darell Crawford¹

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It is with great sadness that we inform our community of the passing of Professor Lawrie Powell.

Lawrie made extraordinary contributions to The University of Queensland, the discipline of Hepatology and all related professional organisations. His stellar academic career was built on his unique understanding of the University's critical place at the intersection of research, teaching and learning, and clinical practice—and the vast potential of this nexus for the creation of new knowledge to improve our understanding of health and disease. And how well he harnessed the power of this space to better understand the pathogenesis and therapy of liver disease, and—particularly his true love—disorders of iron metabolism.

Bridging basic science and clinical medicine to produce clinically relevant research was a passionate, recurrent theme of his academic life. The “Bench to Bedside” catch phrase has been used by many organisations to symbolise their commitment to bridge the gap between science and medicine—but what distinguished Lawrie from others who use this axiom was how well he constructed the bridge. A pivotal part of that construct was his partnership with Professor June Halliday—an outstanding biomedical scientist whose

pragmatic skills perfectly complemented the, at times, idealistic positioning of Lawrie. Lawrie and June with Professor Graham Cooksley established Australia's first Academic Liver Unit at Royal Brisbane Hospital, Queensland. The Liver Unit attracted numerous scholars—both science-based and medically qualified from all over the country and overseas. It was an inspirational environment in which to study and was the academic birthplace of at least eight current professors. Many more Ph.D. students and countless clinical trainees benefited from Lawrie's supervision and guidance.

Lawrie's international reputation was extraordinary. Hepatologists throughout the world were in awe of Lawrie's contributions which were built on his remarkable energy, drive, and unbridled enthusiasm for the discipline. He received awards and distinctions from multiple national liver societies. He was visionary in the profession as illustrated by his founding (with Professor Kunio Okuda of Japan) of the Asian Pacific Association for the Study of the Liver with Lawrie as its inaugural president. He was immensely proud of his role in this association and was delighted that it fulfilled his dream of being the premier association in the Asian Pacific region to foster teaching, research, and the dissemination of knowledge in all aspects of diseases of the liver and biliary system.

Yet, despite his stellar achievements, his global recognition, and his numerous awards, he was at his core a doctor—committed to upholding all the virtues of Hippocrates—deeply admired by his patients and highly respected by his peers. He knew that a medical academic had to be a clinical expert roundly admired by his co-professionals, and whose judgement on difficult cases was sought by colleagues. Lawrie would always claim that clinical and academic excellence were inexorably linked—and that those who chose the academic track had to be first and foremost outstanding clinicians.

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There was so much more to Lawrie's career, with so many lessons for aspiring clinical academics. These few words barely scratch the surface of the breadth of his contributions. However, his rich legacy will live on for generations housed in those who were fortunate to work closely with one of the greatest clinical academics that this country has ever produced.

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