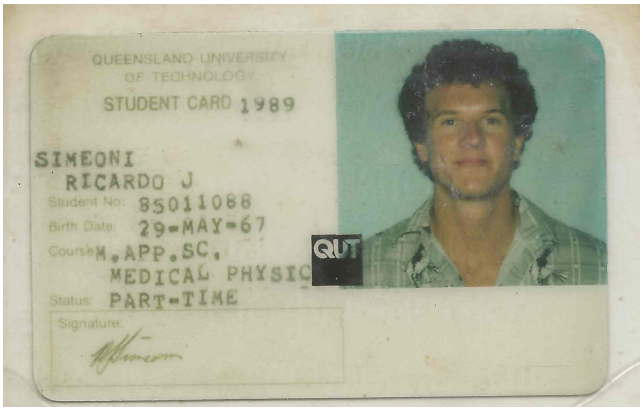
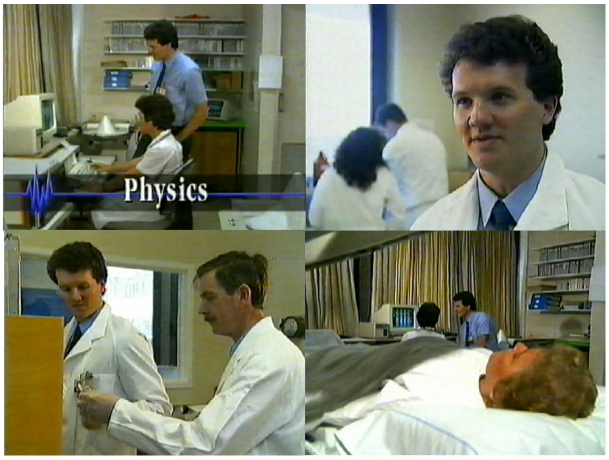
Medical Physics (Royal Brisbane Hospital) 1989-1993



At the start of 1989 I commenced my first school teacher role and a Masters of Medical Physics at QUT. My original intention was to firstly teach and gradually study Medical Physics (i.e., on a part-time basis, as per my student identification card issued early 1989). However, after quickly realising that it was not the right time for teaching I almost immediately transferred to full-time study, and so for most of 1989 teaching and these postgraduate studies were both actually on a full-time basis (with 9 subjects completed as per my academic transcript from the time), and so life was very busy with many afternoon dashes from work into QUT's Gardens Point campus for extended afternoon/evening learning sessions.

In October of 1989 a Medical Physics opportunity arose at the Royal Brisbane Hospital and, although I had planned to move into Medical Physics at a later time closer to the completion of my studies, I decided to accept the new position because of the opportunity presented. And so I stepped from teaching into working at the Royal Brisbane Hospital, with my studies changing to part-time the following year.

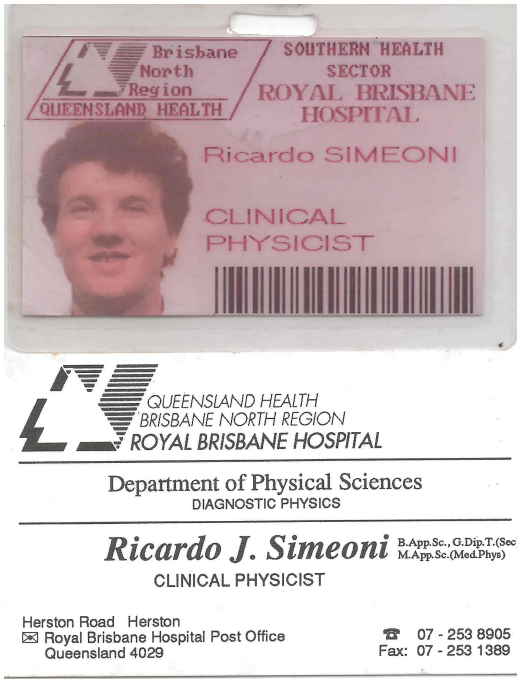
The photos here are from a video clip of my working in the Royal Brisbane Hospital's Nuclear Medicine Department and "Hot Lab". The clip formed part of QUT's 1991 video production *"Science – the Future and You"*, which presented an exposé of graduates in the workplace. The video was a forerunner to the successful "University for the Real World" advertising campaign, so being part of the early days of that campaign, albeit in a small way, is a pleasing memory from the day. I have only shown this video clip 2 or 3 times to students over the course of my 20+ years in education, and one of these occasions is humorously memorable. That is, the very 1st or 2nd showing of the video clip (jumping ahead to the early 2000s) was to a small class of Masters in Sports Physiotherapy students (who were mature students and already practicing physiotherapists undertaking postgraduate studies in an intensive mode around their regular practices). One of the students (an ex Wallaby player, Marty) joked about whether my Mum had bleached my lab coat especially for the video (since it is so bright white). I cannot remember or do justice to the exact wording of the witty remark –



it was one of those occasions where you had to be there (but there being some element of truth to the remark certainly added to the ensuing laughter).

My most significant duty as a Medical Physicist during this Royal Brisbane Hospital period was as the State-wide coordinator of Queensland Health's mammography quality assurance program. That coordinator role was within the earliest days of the State's public breast screening program and, while perhaps being a little biased, I consider it a golden time of the program. The rapport, including a very harmonious working relationship, between clinicians and physicists was lovely and supportive, and the role even resulted in occasionally meeting interesting public figures such as Peter Beattie (albeit briefly). One of the kindest and most memorable clinicians (radiographer) from the time was Bernadette who was visiting with her husband from the US. When I left the Royal Brisbane Hospital to commence my PhD in 1993, Bernadette gifted me a book on mathematical symmetry in nature, and I can honestly say that receiving that book inspired one of my strong areas of academic interest.

The photo below is of some Royal Brisbane Hospital Department of Physical Sciences physics/technical staff and myself (third from right) at my going away lunch. A reference from the then Physicist-in-Charge (third from left) briefly outlining my State-wide coordinator responsibility is attached. The 90's gender imbalance within the photo was helped by my highly regarded replacement (Kerry) and today I believe the balance is quite healthy. As mentioned in my QUT 1985 to 1992 period, I was the first from QUT Medical Physics to be employed within the Department (larger than shown and established long before my time). Two others in the photo, as well as my replacement, were all subsequent QUT Medical Physics graduates.



After leaving the Royal Brisbane Hospital and moving to Townsville, a regional clinician (Megan) from the State-wide program was so welcoming (helping me settle in to a new town by inviting me to dinner with her Family, introducing me to other friendly people, etc.), again typifying the lovely rapport within the program. I am the worst for keeping in contact with friends and when I met Megan again in 2015 it was after many years of no contact, but Megan of course once again warmly invited me to stay at her and husband's rural property now near Ipswich, and that very well sums up the feelings and happy memories from the program.

Other nice memories or opportunities from the time include:

- Presenting lectures to Radiology Registrars and Radiographers (with the Royal Brisbane Hospital being a teaching hospital).
- Becoming a colleague (and not just former student) of Bob Fitchew who is arguably the most highly regarded Medical Physicist in Australia (in my opinion there is no argument). Bob was not an immediate colleague in that he worked in Radiotherapy and I worked in the Diagnostic/Nuclear Medicine areas, but Bob was incredibly generous towards myself (and many others) in terms of sharing his Medical Physics expertise and helping one's professional development.
- Playing weekly social touch football with other hospital staff in Rasey park.
- Collegial joking around my custom made "Ned Kelly suit" which was a heavy duty apron that I had made with about 30 kg of lead and which I sometimes wore when performing some nuclear medicine duties such as eluting the 99Mo/99mTc generator (these days the duty is less hazardous). The good humour around this suit continued for many years beyond my time at the Royal Brisbane Hospital (e.g., when meeting ex-colleagues at a professional meeting or conference).
- Obtaining experience undertaking classic physics duties, which were probably partially a chore at the time but as a physicist you still have to love it. For example, undertaking quality assurance on the hospital's 137Cs blood irradiator and involvement in a wide range of clinical procedures involving radioactive isotopes, some being experimental at the time. On the other hand, cleaning up radioactive vomit, which I recall sent my radiation badge over its limit on one occasion (and the limits were relatively high in those days), may be a step too far in this "nostalgic duties" regard.