

Brendan John Dooley

Obituary of Brendan John Dooley

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Orthopaedic Surgeon

19 February 1929 - December 2018

Brendan Dooley was one of four boys, all born at home to James and Catherine Dooley. Two of his brothers became dentists, while the oldest, Desmond, became a specialist obstetrician gynaecologist in Brisbane. Following in his brother's footsteps, Brendan Dooley graduated from the University of Melbourne St. Vincent's Hospital medical school in 1952.

Right from the start he showed himself to be the best, not necessarily of his fellows, but certainly the best that he could be of himself. Brendan Dooley excelled at almost all that he did claiming, on graduation, first class honours in Surgery and receiving the Ryan Prize and Beane Scholarship on his way to overall second in his final examinations. Indeed, his drive, determination and will to succeed was heralded a few years before, when at the age of 19 he was voted best on ground as a Winger in the Old Xavierian's winning premiership football team. In years to come, he would receive the Gold Medal in Surgical Training and as his son, Michael, an orthopaedic surgeon himself, would later say in his eulogy to Brendan.. "No one ever has, and I doubt ever will, win the Norm Smith Medal in both football and surgery".

After two years in residency (1953-4) at St. Vincent's, Brendan Dooley came under the spell of Thomas "Tom" King, the first head of orthopaedics at St. Vincent's, arguably the oldest orthopaedic dedicated unit in Australia. Following a period as Tom King's resident which he enjoyed very much, Brendan Dooley decided to follow a career in orthopaedics. He travelled with the support of the Archbishop Mannix Travelling Fellowship and the Ryan Prize to England to pursue this interest and succeeded in passing the first part of the FRCS, claiming the Hallett Prize as the top examinee. Soon he also passed his Fellowship before taking up registrarships with two of the doyens of British orthopaedics, namely, Mr. Sam Simmonds and Mr. Graham Apley, at the Rowley Bristow Orthopaedic Hospital and Royal Surrey Hospital in Guilford, respectively. Both of these surgeons, giants in the world of clinical orthopaedics, had a significant influence in establishing the system of orthopaedics that is practised today and which Brendan Dooley helped to embed in the St. Vincent's Wednesday morning orthopaedic case conferences.

In 1957, Brendan Dooley had the opportunity to meet with his mentor, Tom King while Tom was lecturing in London, and this led to a further opportunity to be exposed to academic orthopaedics in the United States. Through an introduction from Tom King, Brendan Dooley spent a year with Dr. Bill Green in the Department of Orthopaedics at the world famous, Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston. While there, he also spent time as a Teaching Fellow in Orthopaedics at Harvard University.

In 1959, Brendan Dooley returned to St. Vincent's to take up the position of assistant orthopaedic surgeon to Tom King. When Tom King retired in 1960, Brendan Dooley bridged the gap as acting head of unit till the return of Mr. Harry Crock in 1962. When Harry Crock became head of unit, there were two units, one comprising Gayton, Grant and Lenaghan and a second, comprising Crock, Dooley and Kevin King, son of Tom. Throughout this time, Brendan Dooley also led the orthopaedic unit at the Preston and Northcote Community Hospital (PANCH) as its inaugural head, a position he held for 33 years (1961-94) until nearing its closure and move to the outer north of Melbourne.

Brendan Dooley's early days as an orthopaedic surgeon heralded the first winds of change with the emergence of specialist interests within orthopaedics. As was de rigueur, Brendan Dooley also practised paediatric orthopaedics through an appointment at the Royal Children's Hospital. He was heavily influenced there by Mr. Eric Price and Mr. Peter Williams, another two doyens of paediatric orthopaedics who were internationally recognised for their operative prowess and particularly in the field of foot and ankle surgery. However, he called time in paediatric orthopaedics because of his obligations and commitments to St. Vincent's and PANCH, finally resigning in 1965 from the Royal Children's Hospital to focus on his adult practice.

Not only was Brendan Dooley an academic leader as an undergraduate, he was committed to raising the bar as a senior surgeon and found a way to fulfil this desire through his roles as Censor-in-Chief of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS), and the Australian Orthopaedic Association (AOA), and later as the President of the AOA and the Vice- President of RACS. Through these roles, he busied himself in establishing the guidelines for training in orthopaedics and the specialties, as well as driving the sense of community and collegiality that is at the essence of the umbrella role of RACS.

Perhaps one of his greatest achievements was, as a member of the Victorian Road Trauma Committee, to drive for the introduction of legislation that mandated the use of seat belts in cars and helmets for motorcyclists. This led to the introduction of mandatory blood alcohol testing for anyone injured in a motor vehicle accident. Through sheer determination of that committee, the legislation was passed, and Victoria became the first place in the world where wearing seat belts in cars became compulsory, immediately invoking a downturn in road accident fatalities and injuries.

Brendan Dooley had many interests and one was to reduce the adversarial encounters between patients and surgeons when accidents in surgery occurred. He pushed hard for a conciliatory approach and supported the development of the medical panels that exist today where expert specialists opine on the care provided by like others in order to mitigate the lengthy, argumentative and often devastating effects of prolonged medico-legal processes. Brendan Dooley had a hand in co-editing and co-authoring chapters in a book entitled *Surgery, Ethics and the Law*. His persistent efforts in educating and leading the medical community in the medico-legal process along with many other contributions was recognised through an honorary Doctorate, the highest award from the Australian Catholic University in 2009 for his contributions to health, and by the LO Betts Medal the highest form of recognition for his services to the Orthopaedic profession.

Together with Jonathan Rush, co-Unit head of Orthopaedics at St. Vincent's, Brendan Dooley developed a vision to continue the legacy of Tom King by building the St. Vincent's Department of Orthopaedics into an academic powerhouse. Together, they worked closely with the Sisters of Charity and the University of Melbourne to create the inaugural Chair of Adult Orthopaedics in Melbourne. Although, he himself was never involved in research, he was a strong advocate for academia as a foundation for better care and encouraged the development of the surgeon-scientist programme in his various roles as President, Censor-in-Chief and Head of Unit. Brendan Dooley would certainly be proud of the long line of higher degree graduates emerging from his department who have gone on to establish themselves as experts in their chosen fields.

Although a very prominent figure in Orthopaedics, Brendan Dooley was also a very private man. When he was at work, he was all surgeon, and leader. When he was at home, his son Michael remembers him as someone who was always "...part of Dad and Mum, Margaret and Brendan Dooley, a wonderfully loving and harmonious couple (at least most of the time!) As a family, we led a simple life. Structure, routine and timetable were interwoven with love, fun and laughter. We were loved and supported totally. Mum and Dad took great pride and joy in each of their children and grandchildren. On Sunday nights the kids cooked tea. We watched television with shows such as Are You Being Served, Love Thy Neighbour, Benny Hill etc. If Mum and Dad said that they were going to do the D.I.Y. thing in terms of putting together Ikea like furniture, then we children ran for the hills. Dad was a consummately skilled surgeon but a shocking handyman."

The closest any of his colleagues got to impinging on his private time was when Brendan Dooley would remind us that after 10pm it was M-O-T (Man's own time). At that point, Margaret would take all the calls and instruct residents and registrars accordingly!!

With his passing, Orthopaedics and Surgery have lost a guiding light, a senior statesman and a man who always knew what was right. His legacy is the profession we have today which is all the more strong, resilient and community spirited for his leadership.

This obituary was kindly provided by Professor Peter F.M. Choong, MBBS, MD FRACS, FAOrthA, FAAHMS

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