



**AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
(SOUTH AUSTRALIA) INC**

Dr Jillian Maxwell, AMA(SA) President 1992 –1994

At the age of 40, I think I was the youngest Branch President, and I was the second of only two women in the Branch's 125 year history. For me personally it was challenging, difficult and personally very fulfilling. I am indebted to those who supported and encouraged me during that time.

The overriding concern for the AMA was the survival of the Branch. The renovation of Newland House and building of AMA House were conceived during a property boom which unfortunately did not last. What began as a capital and income raising exercise almost caused the financial collapse of the Branch in the short term, even though there is no doubt that it will prove to have been a wise investment in the long term. Fortunately the members rallied in a way that I have never seen in any similar organization, enough money was raised and changes were made to the Branch's financial structure to ensure that the problems should never recur.

We had a very high media profile during those two years, starting on my first day with our opposition to proposed relaxation of the poker machine legislation. Almost every day for two years I was asked to comment on some medical issue. It was early in my presidency that I learned to be an early riser, scanning The Advertiser before 6am, which was the time the phone usually started ringing.

The State Health Minister for the majority of my time was Martyn Evans, an Independent Labor MP. Martyn was very accessible and willing to work with us on most issues. The only issue on which we really crossed swords over was the closure of Blyth Hospital, which the Branch opposed very strongly on the grounds that it was almost impossible to attract and retain rural doctors in towns without a hospital.

Mental health and de-institutionalisation achieved a high profile following the tragic murder of a psychiatrist by a patient. AMA pressure ensured that some changes were made to improve the safety of doctors working with seriously disturbed patients.

Another issue was the advent of Divisions of General Practice and practice accreditation. These changes were devised by the profession at two AMA summits held in Canberra. The debates surrounding the changes were enormous. The overriding concern was that Government money would be deflected from GP rebates into funding for Divisions, which unfortunately proved to be accurate.

At that time it was against AMA ethics (and therefore Medical Board rules) for doctors to advertise or to appear in the media in a way that might give them advantage. That made it difficult to get good news medical stories in the media. It is hard to believe now that the Branch Council debated at some length whether it was ethical for doctors to use "bold" and "superbold" listings in the telephone directory! It was resolved that bold entries were in the interests of patients but superbold was excessive and therefore unethical. Fortunately in later years sanity has prevailed.