



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

### **Dr Max Moore, AMA(SA) President 1979 – 1980**

We approached 1979 - 1980 against a turbulent medico-political background. Medibank, introduced by a Labor government in 1973, had been abandoned by the incoming Liberal administration. There was widespread dissatisfaction as rapid changes were made; we were facing the fifth change to the system in four years.

During this time South Australia saw three different state Ministers of Health, the last, Jennifer Adamson in a new Liberal Government under Premier David Tonkin previously an ophthalmologist. Mrs Adamson set up a Health Promotion Resources Unit which helped the AMA(SA) to promote areas including drug addiction, opposition to tobacco advertising, detection of diabetes and particularly drink driving.

Good rapport was established with government ministers, the Health Commission and generally with the media. In matters of community interest the AMA(SA) received willing assistance from media representatives, but on subjects of finance and doctor's fees for which the media seemed to have a voracious appetite, any empathy gave way to aggressive stances, even a willingness to join politicians who sought to blame the failure of changing health schemes on doctors and their incomes.

The AMA and governments were occupied with studies of the number of doctors in Australia and their relationship to education, migration, expenditure in the health services and future needs. For some years the AMA(SA) had warned that the number of doctors was becoming excessive. Others, particularly some politicians and the health bureaucracy, saw an increase in doctor numbers as assuring competition and lower professional fees, also as a means of forcing doctors into remote areas which were under-serviced.

The Karmel Report in 1973 anticipated a need for a one third increase in doctors relative to the population in the next 20 years. In fact, this was reached in only seven years, by 1980. This was largely due to an extraordinary migration of foreign doctors to Australia from countries experiencing political instability, whose medical qualifications had been accepted automatically.

In 1977 alone, the number of foreign doctors immigrating was equivalent to two-thirds of the number of graduates from all Australian universities. Press reports in 1979 stated that 1100 Asian and 200 South Africans had registered to practise in South Australia alone. Late in that year the Medical Board of South Australia required all foreign graduates (other than from UK and New Zealand) to pass the examination of the Australian Medical Examining Council. The pass rate at the first two examinations was 15 per cent.

South Australia had more doctors, relative to population, than any other state and continued to train more than any other state but AMA(SA) attempts to persuade its universities to reduce intakes failed.

Changes in the nursing profession were heralded when in July 1979, the Royal Australian Nursing Federation (RANF) informed the AMA Federal President that it "... believes that nurses are accountable to patients directly, not through the medical profession and they accept direct professional and legal responsibility for patient care". This reflected proposed changes in education, training and the perceived role of nurses, the present in-hospital training to be replaced by tertiary courses. There was considerable concern that in the spirit of the above statement the close working relationship between nurses and doctors in hospitals would be lost.



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Dr Jeanette Linn convened a working party whose report was discussed with RANF, in order to establish an inter-professional organisation for further studies.

Membership issues were always in the minds of Council; only 58 per cent of South Australian doctors were members. Every opportunity was taken to show interest in all groups of practitioners. "Grievance Debates" were arranged to encourage any doctor to voice his needs or complaint.

In 1979 for the first time, just as the first graduates emerged from the Flinders University, the Health Commission did not undertake to employ all graduates for their compulsory intern year. In large part due to AMA(SA) intervention, posts were found.

1979 - 1980 was a challenging year. I like to think we represented our members well, solving a few problems and indicating new ones which lay ahead.