



Thousands owe lives to this trail-blazing doctor

Dr Nigel Drury Gresley Abbott
AM MBBS LLB FRACP
Born: Mar. 29, 1920
Died: Nov. 13, 2011

Dr Nigel Abbott died in Hobart on November 13, 2011 aged 91, but his achievements will continue to aid Tasmanians through their lives.

He was born in Clunes, Victoria on March 29, 1920. Later his father established a medical practice in the Huon Valley.

Nigel went to Geeveston state school and Hutchins. At 14 he attended St Peter's College, Adelaide, matriculating in 1937.

After his first year at the University of Tasmania, he started second-year medicine at the University of Adelaide in 1940. He graduated in 1944, but also had time to play six games for South Adelaide in the SANFL in his final year.

In July 1945, he joined the AIF and served in the Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan from February 1947 to June 1948.

On discharge in July 1948, he enlisted in the Citizen Military Forces (CMF), ending up as Commanding Officer of the 10th Field Ambulance.

Lieutenant Colonel Abbott served in Vietnam from June to September 1968 and immediately made his mark. Dissatisfied with the malarial prophylaxis regimen, he established a new protocol which was then adopted across the Australian forces in Vietnam. The US army was so impressed, it was adopted by all American units in Vietnam.

His medical career was almost entirely in Tasmania including time as a consultant physician at the Royal Hobart Hospital. After his election defeat in 1972, he went to the West Coast as physician at the Queenstown Hospital and later was a GP at Zeehan.

Years later he returned to Hobart and ran a general practice at Kingston.

He served in State Parliament from 1964 to 1972 and made a massive contribution.

His greatest achievements were the changes he introduced as Minister for Health and Road Safety in the Bethune government from 1969 to 1972.

These include the establishment of the Division of Road Safety, legislation introducing the points demerit system, legislation protecting the public against drink driving and, most importantly, legislation mandating seatbelts.

His passionate commitment to road safety was influenced by the tragic death of his daughter Felicity in a road accident in 1952.

The effects of his legislative changes are profound.

The Premier, Lara Giddings, said "few who have served in this place will ever be able to claim a legacy as profound and lasting as that of Dr Abbott".

She said he had saved hundreds if not thousands of lives; saved countless Tasmanian families untold pain and anguish; saved countless Tasmanians from painful and debilitating injuries; and saved the community untold millions of dollars in medical costs and lost economic opportunities.

Another major achievement of Dr Abbott was the introduction of water fluoridation, the first Australian minister of health to do so.

Premier Giddings' remarks were no exaggeration.

The road death toll in 1971 was 131. In 2010 it was 31. In the five years prior to Dr Abbott's legislation it averaged 116 per year and in the past five years it has averaged 45 per year.

Thousands of Tasmanian lives and many thousands of serious injuries were prevented by his

fierce, unrelenting determination despite intense opposition.

When the Legislative Council failed to pass legislation he viewed as critical, he resigned and stood unsuccessfully as an Independent Liberal in Denison in 1972.

He served as an alderman on the Hobart City Council from 1962-4 and on the Kingborough Council from 1988-96. For service to the community, to local government and to the Parliament he was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1994. He is survived by Jocelyn, his wife of 63 years, and by their remaining children Tony, Deb, Clive, Geoff and Rick.

DR MICHAEL LOUGHHEAD

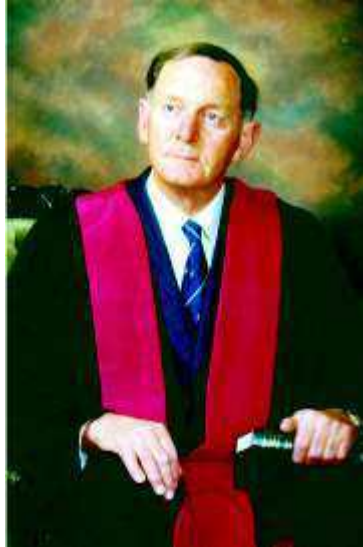


REGAL TOUCH: Dr Abbott with Queen Elizabeth II at the opening of a new wing at the Royal Hobart Hospital in 1970.



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LEGACY: Dr Abbott made his mark with road safety.