

Professor John Biddulph

John Biddulph's passing leaves a gap in our Region which will be felt widely for many years. This loss will be most deeply felt in Papua New Guinea where he spent most of his professional life but it will also be noticed throughout the Pacific, in Australia and elsewhere.

I had the privilege to train with John in Port Moresby during 1967. I was then a keen, young registrar from the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, one of the first in a placement program that was to expose us to the realities of paediatrics and child health in a tropical, developing country. The overnight change from the air-conditioned, modern, up-to-date practice of paediatrics in Melbourne to the care of sick children in a poor nation with a very limited health budget was an eye-opener. Antibiotics and other drugs and support services and facilities were restricted but John had devised a little booklet which showed how to treat the commonest conditions (mainly malaria, other infections, anaemia and malnutrition) that affected the local children. Needles and tubing for intravenous drips had to be re-sterilized and recycled and the ward rounds were done after the floor of the children's ward had been hosed down for the day and the patients' families had come back to camp near or under the beds.

John explained the appropriateness of these circumstances and patiently and kindly revealed how to be accepted and work effectively and sensitively in a cross-cultural environment. He showed how to tailor paediatric practice to local needs, capacities and expectations. 'Doctor boys' (aid post

orderlies) were then providing much of the services to remote and inaccessible areas. John made sure that the young trainees from 'down south' worked in communities, did community clinics and village patrols and obtained an understanding of what primary health care really is.

One of John's most remarkable achievements was to bring into law restrictions on the use of baby feeding bottles throughout Papua New Guinea. This saved countless young lives and has been seen by health administrators in many other countries as a model to follow. I will remember John as a skilful and understanding teacher who leaves a living legacy in the paediatricians, other doctors, nurses and other health workers whom he influenced in his adopted country over many years. My fondest memories will be of John as the family man, when he and Mary invited me for lunch with them and the children. This occurred on many occasions when they felt I may have been lonely because I was so far from my own family and friends. My wife Valerie and I sympathize with Mary in her deep loss but we know that the strongly held convictions which she and John shared will help support her.

Michael Gracey

President, International Paediatric Association
Professor of Aboriginal Health
School of Public Health
Curtin University of Technology
GPO Box U1987
Perth, WA 6845
Australia