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College Roll: Robertson, Sandy Edwin John

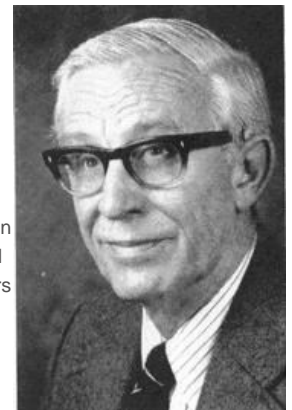
Qualifications: AM (1980) MB BS Syd (1939) MRACP (1947) MRCP (1952) FRACP (1961) FRCP (1974)

Born: 18/10/1915

Died: 14/7/1988

Biography:

Sandy Robertson was born at Collarenebri NSW. He was the only son of F Gordon Robertson who graduated in medicine in 1906. Educated at Cranbrook School, Sandy gained his colours in rugby, rowing and athletics and was captain of his house. In his early years at Sydney University he played rugby and rowed. In the latter years he became a member of the Bondi and Palm Beach Surf Clubs and also enjoyed yachting and golf. Following graduation in December 1939 he commenced duties as RMO at St Vincents Hospital, Sydney.



Early in 1940 he enlisted in the Army as a medical officer and in mid 1940 was called up as RMO to the 6th Division reinforcements at Greta Camp. Later that year with the formation of the 8th Division he was attached to the 2/10 Field Ambulance. He married Gwenda Ashcroft at St Mark's Church, Darling Point on 11 October 1940. She proved most supportive of Sandy and they were a devoted couple and understanding parents over the ensuing years. Gwenda nursed him in his final lengthy illness with devotion and understanding. In early 1941 he was one of two officers and 20 other ranks to be posted to Rabaul New Britain, to run a small hospital for Lark Force. Within a few weeks of the outbreak of war with the Japanese he was, together with his men, taken POW and shipped to Zentsuji Camp on Suikoku Island, Japan. During the period of his captivity he developed diabetes, lost the sight of one eye following a physical assault by his captors, and suffered severe malnutrition.

Following his return to Australia at the end of hostilities, he was appointed to the honorary staff of the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children as relieving assistant physician. In addition he secured appointments at the Renwick Hospital for Infants and ran a general practice. In 1951 Sandy was the Travelling Fellow of the postgraduate committee in medicine of the University of Sydney. In 1952 following postgraduate study in UK and USA he commenced consultant practice and was one of the first full-time paediatricians.

Sandy was a pre-eminent Sydney paediatrician serving the RAHC for 32 years. In addition he was a paediatrician to and served on the council of the Royal Blind Society of NSW for 25 years. In recognition of his important contribution, the society named the "Sandy Robertson Kindergarten" at Burwood in his honour. Amongst other honorary appointments he was the senior paediatric physician at St Margaret's Hospital, where he established the technique of exchange blood transfusion and performed more than 1000 such procedures.

Sandy was mainly responsible for the organisation of postgraduate medical education at RAHC and represented the hospital on the postgraduate committee in medicine. For many years he organised general practitioner refresher courses and also organised country weekend courses in paediatrics throughout the state. In the two decades from 1955 to 1975 he did more for postgraduate education in paediatrics in Sydney than any other person. Sandy was in the vanguard of the management of juvenile diabetes and became very experienced in the management of haemolytic disease of the newborn and his knowledge and work in this field were highly acclaimed. For ten years he was physician in charge of the haematology clinic at RAHC and worked in close association with the hospital's haematologist, Dr VA Lovric. In earlier years he had been heavily involved in the management of respirator patients during the polio epidemics. He served the Childrens Hospital well over the years being secretary of the medical staff council for four years and elected representative on the board of management and served on the conjoint board of the hospital and Sydney University.

Sandy was well known for his conscientious approach to his work, and his meticulous recording of clinical observations. He set a standard not often equalled. He could be quite dogmatic and at times had a fearsome effect on colleagues, parents and administrators alike, but at all times was found gentle and understanding of his patients. His bark was certainly louder than his bite. His meticulous attention to detail will be remembered by many of his colleagues at the Wade House Consulting Rooms during the daily monitoring of share price movements at the lunch-time call during the mineral boom of the 60s.

Sandy assembled and organised beautifully a large stamp collection. By contrast he was introduced to the art of trout fishing by his friend and surgical colleague Tom Nelson, and became an enthusiast in this difficult sport. In his latter years he was an opera devotee, giving this pursuit all the study and love he was accustomed to in his other wide range of interests. Sandy Robertson made a very substantial contribution to paediatrics in Sydney. He left his widow Gwenda, two daughters Edwina and Victoria, and innumerable patients grateful for his medical care and skills.

Author: AW MIDDLETON

References: *Munk's Roll*, VIII, 422-3; *Aust Paed J* 1988 **24**, 321; Sydney Morning Herald 14 Jun 1980.

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