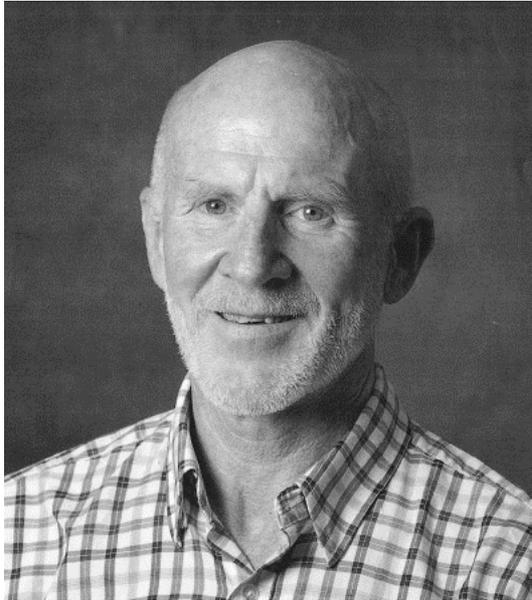


Eric Fairbank



Dr Eric Fairbank has had a truly remarkable career. After 18 years working in a country General Practice, Eric moved into to palliative care, and in 1986, he was appointed Director of Palliative Care Unit at Warrnambool Base Hospital. He went on to hold this position for 27 years before retiring in 2013.

Eric's involvement with Palliative Care Victoria and the motivation behind shifting careers began in the 1980s after he read a biography on Elizabeth Kubler Ross.

“Palliative care is seeing the patient and their family as a whole. Working in the industry has been a huge benefit to me both personally and professionally.”

“Reading about Elizabeth Kubler Ross and her books on death and dying, I didn't find it as morbid as I thought it might be. I was asked to join a hospital committee in Warrnambool, as they wanted to initiate a palliative care service, which I knew nothing about. Two years later in 1986, I found myself the Director of the Warrnambool Base Hospital Palliative Care Unit.”

“For the next 14 years, I combined general practice and palliative care, until palliative medicine became a speciality in 2000. More recently, I've helped to establish The Warrnambool & District Community Hospice, and its Hospice in the Home program that has been in operation since 2016.

Changes in the sector

Eric believes that one of the most positive changes across the past 40 years has been the promotion of advance care planning, but also highlights we have a way to go when it comes to allowing people to die at home rather than in the hospital.

“Until 1988 Victoria didn't even have any legislation that allowed advance care planning or the right to refuse unwanted treatment and even then, there wasn't any system that worked. In the 2000's it began to be effectively used. They still have a way to go and give people the opportunity to have their wishes respected at the end of life.”

“It is much more economical and better for quality of life for people to die in the comfort of their own home, and for them to have better community services to support them. It's too much for a family to do it on their own.”

Celebrating 40 years of palliative care in Victoria

When talking about the 40-year anniversary of Palliative Care Victoria, Eric highlighted the beneficial aspects of an organisation like Palliative Care Victoria and how it further supports communities.

“Palliative Care Victoria has been incredibly supportive throughout my time at Warrnambool, particularly with the new hospice centre.”

“Palliative Care Victoria has provided a lot of personal support for individuals.”

“I think the changes they've made in the community have also been paramount. They used to have an 'About Series' and if you wanted a pamphlet about dying, pain control or about some of the other symptoms people might be suffering from, you could go there.”

“They've now updated that series into a publication called Living, Dying and Grieving Well. Such resources are of benefit to both palliative care practitioners and the wider community.”

“Going forward, we just need to keep the focus right, as most people don't need a palliative care specialist to die. They need an organised community with the appropriate knowledge and skills to support them as they go through that process.”