

40 STORIES IN 40 YEARS

Michael 'Taffy' Jones AM



Dr. Michael 'Taffy' Jones AM is a humble man, but one who has played an integral part in the development of palliative care services across Victoria.

However, his achievements are not limited to palliative care. Taffy also worked as a consultant for the World Health Organisation and was the founding chair of the Board of the Victorian Doctors' Health Program.

"I started life as a country GP, before going into medical administration. I worked as a Medical Director for the Geelong Hospital and later at the Austin Hospital and Alfred Hospital in Melbourne."

While working at Geelong, Taffy was instrumental in creating the very first domiciliary palliative care service in Australia, Geelong Hospice Care Association.

"I worked alongside a general practitioner and physician to create the service in Geelong. I was lucky that they were both as passionate as I was about palliative care. It took a bit of work and it was incredible challenging, but we were very driven."

"I was exceptionally lucky in my career. I was always in the right place at the right time to get what I wanted. I had incredible people around me, who were terrific to work with."

Taffy stayed in Geelong for quite some time, before moving to Melbourne to start a job as a Medical Director at The Austin Hospital.

“When I came up to The Austin in around 1988, I found that there were no palliative care services or any support in the community. So, I worked with a number of other very influential people to start the Banksia Palliative Care service.”

Taffy began a campaign to educate the community about palliative care and on March 20th, 1989, the first Committee meeting was held. On June 19th the same year, the office bearers were elected, Taffy was elected Deputy Chairman and Banksia formally began.

“Both Geelong and Banksia have terrific people on the board and within both of those services I had terrific people with me to understand what palliative care all is about and supporting what I was trying to do.”

Eventually, Taffy left The Austin and took up a position as the Director of Medical Services at The Alfred Hospital where he worked for a number of years.

“We found that at the beginning, patients were very accepting of palliative care. They didn’t want to die in hospital and they didn’t want to die surrounded by people they didn’t know.”

“After I retired from the Alfred Hospital in 2000, I went on to do private consultancy in Australia, and also consulted with the World Health Organisation, and did most of my work in South East Asia, Vietnam and the Philippines. It meant using a different approach to improve basic health standards, so it was challenging but it was fun.”

It was also at this time that Taffy was appointed the first Chair of the Board of the Victorian Doctors Health Program, ‘a free and confidential service for all doctors and medical students who have concerns about their wellbeing.’ His commitment for the service is described as ‘crucial for the early development of the program.’

Though he is somewhat removed from palliative care nowadays, throughout his career Taffy has always remained steadfast about how important palliative care is.

“Dying is a very important time in our lives, so it should be done how a person wants it done, and palliative care allows that – it allows people to die in at home, looked after by people that they know.”