



HUMANS OF THE ROYAL

Dr David Cooper



Dr David Cooper was the Royal Women's Hospital Medical Superintendent from 1967 to 1974 and is fondly known as the "father of ultrasound". He made a major contribution to Obstetrics in Queensland by pioneering fetal diagnosis with ultrasound equipment.

After graduating in Medicine from the University of Queensland in 1957, David spent two years as a Resident Medical Officer at the Brisbane General Hospital. He then trained in Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Perth prior to obtaining the Membership of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (MRCOG) in London in 1963.

As Medical Superintendent at the Royal Women's Hospital from 1967 to 1974, he oversaw important structural changes including the introduction of an airconditioned nursery and labour wards, an additional theatre and the employment of a full-time anaesthetist.

His improvements in the labour ward included relieving the nursing staff of the responsibility for washing dirty bedding and rubber gloves. He dramatically improved sterilisation standards by setting up a central sterilisation supply, banning the use of reusable syringes and the use of lifters (tongs). He also initiated replacement of the old wire cots with modern acrylic cots which were more hygienic.

In later years, a senior consultant stated that David had dragged the Royal Women's Hospital into the 20th century.

After trying unsuccessfully to interest Queensland obstetricians and radiologists in ultrasound, David developed the field himself. At that time, it was considered that this lack of interest was due to their view that the equipment was primitive and not useful. It was also expensive and required regular updates due to advances in technology.

As a result, David did all the ultrasound scanning himself and attended the clinical meetings of the newly formed Australian Society for Ultrasound in Medicine and Biology. In addition, David took study leave to visit England and Europe to observe the use of ultrasound.

In 1967, the first Xray guided intrauterine transfusion in Queensland was conducted by Dr Ken Wilson and, subsequently, a team of three specialists (David Cooper, Eva Popper and Bobbie Bevan) were responsible for this work. This procedure changed from Xray to Ultrasound guidance in the 1970s.

When David resigned at the end of 1974 he was appointed Visiting Specialist in Ultrasound providing a service not only for the Royal Women's Hospital but also for the Royal Brisbane Hospital which, at the time, had no such facility.

In 1975, David went into private practice on Wickham Terrace as an Obstetrician and Gynaecologist specialising in Ultrasound.



Pictured: The old iron cots Dr David Cooper was instrumental in replacing. Used from the 1930s until the 1960s, they were unhygienic and hard to clean.