

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA TO OPEN A MEDICAL HISTORY
AND RESEARCH SEMINAR AS PART OF THE LAUNCESTON
GENERAL HOSPITAL SESQUICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS,
LAUNCESTON WEDNESDAY 15TH MAY 2013.**

It is a great pleasure for me to be here in the middle of a week devoted to celebrating the sesquicentenary of the first admission of patients to the newly built Launceston General Hospital, and 150 years of caring for the people of the Northern Tasmanian Community. I congratulate the Launceston General Hospital's Historical Committee, Mr Kirwan, the other hospital executives and the volunteers for putting together a most interesting series of events throughout the week. I also express my appreciation to the sponsors who are listed in the programme for their all-important support of this celebration. The week began with tours, addresses and a church service to mark International Nurses Day. Monday was devoted to more tours of the LGH, the Art Exhibition and the unveiling of a bronze bust of Sir John Ramsay. Yesterday saw two tours of the Charles Hotel and the Premier's launch of the sesquicentenary book entitled "Launceston General Hospital, 150 years of Caring", and today marks the first of three days devoted to seminars grouped under the umbrella title of "Medical, Historical and Research Seminars." To organise all of this must have called for a tremendous amount of initiative and hard work.

Apart from a gubernatorial visit here just after I was appointed Governor, my last visit to the Launceston General Hospital was in 1954. It was just before Christmas that year when, as school boy, I was admitted for a tonsillectomy. I am pleased to be able to report that surgery was uneventful and the standard of post-operative care was impeccable. I well recall the gallons of ice cream that were served up to

me and the nurses decorating the ward for the Christmas celebrations. Indeed, the decorations and the air of anticipation and excitement was almost palpable, such that I begged my parents to let me stay in hospital for Christmas. I explained to them that it clearly would be more fun than Christmas at home with them, which only led to a silent and rather strained trip home in the car!!

Construction of the first purpose built hospital in Launceston began in 1860 and was funded by the colonial government and the first patients were admitted in January 1863 – 150 years ago. It appears that the hospital got off to a good start. The annual report of the Launceston General Hospital for the year 1865 that was tabled in Parliament recounted that:

“... the Board has every reason to believe the efficiency and usefulness of the Hospital continue unimpaired. The Hospital has been visited recently by many medical gentlemen and other visitors from the neighbouring colonies, and it has been a matter of much satisfaction to the Board to learn from the opinions expressed by those persons that the Institution is unsurpassed in the Australia. The number of both In-door and Out-door patients has considerably increased during the year, and the expenditure has been on the lowest possible scale compatible with efficiency.”¹

The annual report sets out in minute detail the conditions that were treated over the year and the number of diseases and injuries that ended fatally e.g., pneumonia, dysentery, hepatitis etc., and at the very

¹ Launceston Examiner newspaper Wednesday, 8 August 1866, page 2.

end it was noted that there were 5 deaths from what was rather ambiguously referred to as “infirmity of age”.

Over the years various additions to the LGH have been constructed, not all of which have fitted harmoniously with the existing buildings. Now the hospital has morphed into the Hotel Charles, but its business of healing the sick continues in its new buildings just over the road, and the plain fact is that for 150 continuous years the Launceston General Hospital has been caring for the Northern Tasmanian Community; a fact that in itself is well worth celebrating.

As is fitting for a celebration such as this, over today and the next two days there will be a number of scholarly lectures dealing with medical issues, learned lectures dealing with relevant historical events and some scholarly and learned lectures dealing with both issues. But I have to say that it seems to me that the one that takes to prize for the biggest coverage of both issues is to be given by Professor Bernie Einoder. It is entitled “The evolution of surgery from 15,000 BC to 2010 AD”. I have no doubt that Professor Einoder will deliver it with his usual flair and enthusiasm. It begins with an account of making a hole in the skull to let the evil spirits out!!

So, as Governor of Tasmania, I commend the seminar series to all of you and formally declare them open. Again, I congratulate the Launceston General Hospital Historical Committee and all the others who have put together a week of wonderful, intellectual and stimulating events and lectures to celebrate the sesquicentenary of the Launceston General Hospital and the care that it has given to the Northern Tasmanian Community over the last 150 years.