

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA AT THE OPENING OF THE 10TH
ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC MEETING OF MEDICAL IMAGING AND
RADIATION THERAPY, HOBART FRIDAY 8TH MARCH 2013**

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all here to the beautiful city of Hobart. I understand that we have delegates and partners here from all over Australia, from New Zealand and from other countries as well. To all our visitors, I not only extend a very warm welcome, but also express the hope that you will be able to find some time to look around our island State while you are here for it always looks particularly beautiful at the start of Autumn.

When I open a conference, I always like to say a few words that are relevant to the issues to be raised at the conference. Although my background is the law, I trolled through your programme to see if I could find a topic that I might address. I briefly toyed with the idea of giving you the benefit of my views on “Extracorporeal Irradiation for neoplasms of the Bone” or perhaps “The use of dynamic radiation therapy treatment technique for rectal cancer”, but decided as I knew absolutely nothing about either of those, or for that matter, *any* of the topics on your programme, I would just have to treat you to my 3-hour dissertation on the “Development of the Rule of Law and the Importance of an Independent Judiciary”. However, I will have to disappoint you, for strangely, my wife thought that that would not be a good idea.

The trouble is that, although I have had occasional professional contact with radiographers, I don't really know any radiographers on a personal basis. However, I do have a friend who is a radiologist. Actually, he is a bit of an eccentric. He lives in Canberra and is a mad keen amateur balloonist. I see that there is a session at the conference on balloons, but I gather that they are not the ones that carry people into the air! My friend told me that one fine, still morning he was floating high up in the air near Canberra when clouds closed in and he lost his way. So he lowered his balloon until he was just below the cloud cover and as he did so, he saw a man walking across a paddock beneath him. So my friend leaned over the edge of his basket and called out to the man, "Excuse me, but can you tell me where I am?" The man looked up and said, "Yes, you're in a hot air balloon, hovering 30 metres above this paddock."

"You must be a radiographer." shouted my friend.

"Well, actually I am." replied the man. "How did you know?"

"Well," said my radiologist friend in the balloon, "everything you have told me is technically correct, but it's of no use to anyone."

The radiographer shouted back, "Actually you sound just like a radiologist."

"Well how on earth did you know that?" replied my friend.

"Well," said the radiographer, "you don't know where you are, or where you're going, but you expect me to be able to help. You're in the same position you were in before we met, but now it's my fault."

Browsing around to find a subject I did understand, I came across an article published in your magazine, entitled “Profession and Professionalism in Medical Radiation Science as an Emergent Profession” by Jenny Sim and Alex Radloff.¹ As I understand the paper, its thrust is to point out, or perhaps complain, that unfairly, radiography is not properly recognised as a profession. But perhaps surprisingly, the authors don’t blame others for this state of affairs but put it down in large measure to apathy, low self-esteem and an unwillingness by medical radiation science professionals to move beyond their comfort zone.

Of course, there are no set rules or universally recognised criteria as to what constitutes a profession but there seems to be general agreement that the attributes of a profession include:

- (1) a skill based on abstract knowledge;
- (2) the provision for training and education, usually associated with a university;
- (3) certification based on competency testing;
- (4) a formal organization;
- (5) adherence to a code of conduct, which includes engagement in continual professional development; and
- (6) altruistic service.

¹ Radiography (2009) 15, 203 – 208.

The authors would add 'autonomy' to that list, but I am not sure that is the case to-day when the politician's urge to control every aspect of human activity has seen the disappearance of autonomy from even the oldest professions. I am referring here to the law and medicine, of course.

Now, the article to which I refer was written before implementation of the changes that were brought about by the introduction of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme and the creation of the Medical Radiation Practice Board of Australia, but I doubt very much if the authors would say that development has changed their views about medical radiation science being recognised as a profession. True, the change sees an Australia-wide statutory requirement for radiographers to complete at least 60 hours of CPD over three years to maintain their registration, but as I understand the article at its heart, the complaint is that the public do not understand the nature of medical radiation science and accordingly do not accord it the status of a profession. A consequence of that is that those who practice medical radiation science have become apathetic and live with an inferiority complex.

If that is right, it is a shame because, as my children would say, medical radiation science ticks all the professional boxes. It does concern a skill based on abstract knowledge. These days, that abstract knowledge is acquired at a University or other tertiary education institution to a measured and tested standard which in

practical terms, is largely set by its professional body, the Australian Institute of Radiography. The practice of medical radiation science, both therapeutic and diagnostic, is formally organised and there is a code of conduct, which includes engagement in continual professional development.

So, judged by generally accepted criteria, medical radiation science is clearly a profession and the real trouble is that this fact is not readily visible. Indeed, I am aware that radiographers have to live in the shadows of the radiologists, just as solicitors have to live in the shadow of the barristers although both barristers and solicitors are widely accepted as professionals; it is just that barristers deem themselves superior to solicitors. The authors say that medical radiation science practitioners don't seem to see themselves as professionals, and just practice in accordance with set protocols. The authors bemoan a lack of motivation to engage in life-long learning and, from the extensive research cited in this first class article, this clearly seems to be the case. They say that the concentration is all on the mechanics and the machinery of the business and there is no reflection on, or research into, medical radiation science and in this context I do note with interest that this conference is entitled the "State of the Art" and most of the sessions do seem to concern the technology of radiation science.

The authors conclude that, apart from 'autonomy' and 'altruism', the attributes of medical radiation science fit the criteria of

a profession. I would completely agree with that. Indeed, I would go further and add that, as mentioned, in these days of widespread bureaucratic intervention, I would not regard autonomy as an essential criterion and I would not see the absence of altruism as fatal. After all, altruism is seen as a criterion largely because it is an important aspect of the professions of law and medicine. But those professions grew up in times long past and lend themselves to altruism a lot easier than does the medical radiation science. For my part, I am in no doubt that medical radiation science is a profession, not just an emergent profession and a very important one in the general health professions. Even the Australian Government recognises this fact for the Medical Registration Practice Board declares on its web site that it is working in partnership with the Australian Health Practitioners Registration Authority to protect the public and guide the *profession*.²

The article concludes with these words, "... having reflection as a focus of CPD programmes forms the key to empowering MRS practitioners. Reflective practitioners are best placed to address the major challenges that are currently facing the MRS profession and ultimately to assist practitioners in advancing clinical practice and in moving the profession towards achieving true professional status."

I respectfully agree with the authors' conclusion except that, in my opinion, it is not a question of *achieving* professional status. That

² <http://www.medicalradiationpracticeboard.gov.au/> accessed 3rd March 2013

has been achieved. It is a question of achieving public recognition of the professional status of medical radiation science and that is - perhaps in part - a public relations issue.

Well, I see that by now many of you are wishing I had not heeded my wife's advice and had delivered my 3-hour dissertation on the "Development of the Rule of Law and the Importance of an Independent Judiciary."

So I'll just say that it is with great pleasure that I declare open the 10th Annual Scientific Meeting of Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy. I trust each of you will find this meeting interesting, stimulating and exciting and that, after you have returned to your professional duties, it will indeed, provoke you to reflection and study.