

# Tony Clarkson: a great all-rounder

**Anthony Russell Clarkson  
AM, MB BS, MD, FRACP, FRCP**

1939 - 2011

**T**HE distinguished South Australian physician, sportsman and humanitarian, Dr Anthony ('Tony' or 'Doc') Clarkson, died on January 25, 2011, of complications from acute myeloid leukaemia.

Coming from the Eyre Peninsula via Prince Alfred College, Tony studied medicine at the University of Adelaide. A very able student, he combined study with a highly successful sporting career, as well as meeting his wife-to-be Helen.

His initial postgraduate training was at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Adelaide, where he came under the influence of prominent members of the Adelaide medical fraternity, including John Waddy, Steve Milazzo, Allan Kerr Grant and Jim Lawrence.

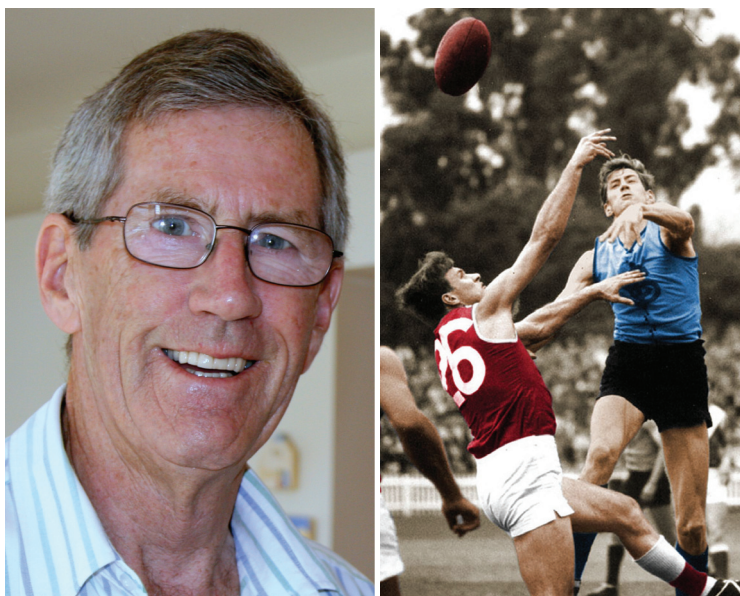
Jim successfully lured him into training in the relatively new specialty of nephrology, although he had been seriously tempted to become a general physician. During this time he also became a legendary figure for the powerful Adelaide University football team (The Blacks), followed by becoming an integral part of the famous multiple premiership-winning Sturt Football Club in the 1960s. His tall, gangly figure with thick glasses is still remembered vividly by keen football followers.

Less well known is his success for the Adelaide University cricket team, for whom (by his own description) he was a fearsome opening bowler and an excellent tail end batsman.

Following a Churchill fellowship and four years in Edinburgh and London, he was appointed the inaugural director of the

Renal Unit at the Royal Adelaide Hospital in 1973, a position he held until 1998. He retired from full-time practice in 2003. Amongst his many contributions to nephrology were his time on the council of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Nephrology (ANZSN) (1976 to 1982, including serving as society president from 1980 to 1982), and the International Society of Nephrology council from 1997 to 2005.

Tony had a major role in the evolution of nephrological education programs for developing countries, and was much valued in active teaching and planning participation, notably in South-East Asia and particularly in Myanmar. He was



elected a life member of ANZSN in 2003, and also was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his services to nephrology and the community.

He was a member of the Medical Board of South Australia from 1989 until 2005, serving as president from 1997 to 2005. Taking on this challenging but incredibly important role evolved in a typically Tony way. He had written several letters to the board complaining about the rising medical registration fees. When the unexpected invitation came from Allan Kerr Grant to join the Board, Tony enquired as to the reason, and was told, "it was the most efficient way to silence an upstart bastard like you".

This brief summary, though, does not do sufficient credit to Tony's contributions to medicine and society, in this country and around the world. An outstanding clinician, he was a legendary figure in medical circles, with his skill, wit, insight, gregariousness, and inviting and friendly disposition. Everybody who interacted with Tony has at least one story to tell, and he was universally liked and respected, not least by his many patients. He took a personal interest in mentoring young nephrologists, and was a great teacher of students and physician trainees.

Perhaps though, the most out of the ordinary impression that Tony left

was his treatment of all around him as equals. It didn't matter if the person was the Minister of Health of a large country, a specialist colleague, a young medical student, a nurse on the renal unit, or the hospital cleaning lady, he always had a kind word and a smile. The only occasional exceptions were supporters of a particular football team that will remain nameless.

He was a dedicated family man, a loyal friend, a keen fisherman at his beloved Black Point, and a consumer of fine wine.

Many doctors in South Australia have benefited from Tony's leadership, guidance, and friendship, and he will be greatly missed.

**Prof Randall Faulk**

*Prof Randall Faulk was a friend and colleague of Dr Tony Clarkson.*

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