



# In vale: John Clayer

**John Reeves Clayer**  
**MB, BS, MD, DPM, FRANZCP**  
**1935-2006**

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John was born in 1935. After secondary education at St Peter's College, he graduated with an MB, BS from the University of Adelaide in 1959. At that time, in a six-year course, only twelve hours were devoted to psychiatry, but he made a conscious decision to specialize in psychiatry because he developed diabetes at the age of 16.

In the early 1960s, he completed his internship at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital (TQEH), followed by registrar in psychiatry positions at Parkside Mental Hospital, TQEH and the Royal Park Hospital in Melbourne. The latter came about because in the 1950s and early 1960s, if any South Australian doctor wished to get a higher degree in psychiatry, he or she either went overseas or completed the Melbourne Diploma of Psychological Medicine, the latter requiring a three-month residence at an appropriate Melbourne hospital. In 1964, together with Mick Mickleburgh and John Litt, he lived in the Royal Park Hospital's nurses' home while employed at the hospital. The then-superintendent was Dr John Cade, who became world famous and also received a Presidential Citation for his work on lithium.

Back in Adelaide in 1965, he was promoted to the position of psychiatrist at Glenside Hospital. When Prof. Bill

Cramond left the Mental Health Service to become a full-time professor, he bequeathed to Dr Bill Dibden the need to arrange a syllabus for post-graduate training in psychiatry. The time was ripe for such a program, and John, who later became deputy superintendent of Glenside in 1970, was given the job of nurturing it, which he did with unusual flair and enthusiasm. He became noted for the mock examinations to which candidates were subjected before the real thing. On the Australian scene, it was noted that South Australia produced superb psychiatrists with a high pass rate.

After obtaining his Diploma in Psychological Medicine in 1965, he became a member of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists and a fellow in 1974. In 1969, he was made a fellow of the American Geriatrics Society. He published or presented papers on a wide range of topics, and was published in a number of prestigious journals.

In 1974 he became assistant director of Mental Health. While in this position, in 1976 he was awarded an MD from the University of Adelaide, his thesis being on the topic of juvenile diabetes and personality development.

In 1977 he became acting director of Mental Health. In 1981 until retirement, he occupied the positions of director of the South Australian Mental Health Research and Evaluation Centre and director of postgraduate training and development.

John held many other appointments. By way of example, he was a member of the Nurses' Board for many years. He lectured in psychiatry to various groups including the School of Social Science at Flinders University, and from 1975 to 1985 he was the president of the South Australian Association for Mental Health. He had a 42-year relationship with Glenside Hospital, from 1961 to 2003, until ill health intervened. After retirement, he entered private practice with a special interest in medico-legal matters.

John was prepared to take on unpopular causes. He received a good deal of media attention for his passionate opposition to the proposed closure of Glenside Hospital. He was an activist. No doubt, if he had taken up law, he would have been a brilliant barrister. His convictions were carried so strongly that a family member stated he was always right. John talked about the iron fist in a velvet glove.

John and his first wife Jill raised three children. Mark is an orthopaedic surgeon, Simon is studying law and Kirsty is also a medical practitioner. Clara, John's second wife, was co-author with him of a number of publications. In his final illness his health deteriorated rapidly from an aggressive brain tumour, allowing little time for palliative care. John was a unique person with a unique style and he practiced a unique style of medicine.

**Dr Lothar Hoff**

*Dr Lothar Hoff is a psychiatrist and former superintendent of Glenside Hospital.*