



AACB

The Australasian Association of Clinical Biochemists

The Australasian Association of Clinical Biochemists – Celebrating 50 Years of Serving Clinical Biochemistry in Australia.

The Australasian Association of Clinical Biochemists (AACB) celebrates its 50th Anniversary in 2011. Currently the Association is a vibrant, active and progressive organization with about 1,000 members and 21 corporate members. It plays a very active role in ensuring members are kept informed on the latest developments in the profession through running education programs, scientific meetings, specialist seminars, scientific projects, circulating information on professional affairs and interacting with similar professional associations that represent other parts of our profession.

The formation of the AACB grew from the fact that in the 1950s, emerging hospital laboratories were increasingly being run by graduates of medicine or PhD's in chemistry. These clinical biochemists started to meet as a group during more general scientific meetings which led to the formation of a "Clinical Biochemistry Study Group". On May 26th, 1961 at a meeting held in Brisbane at which it was agreed that an Association should be formed. There was significant debate on the name and whether the new Association should also include New Zealand but it was thought New Zealand would want to go on their own and it would be easier for an Australian Association to apply for government seeding money.

After the initial meeting, development into a viable Association was rapid with Dr JA Owen as Chair and Dr DH Curnow as Secretary. There were 105 founding members and the first Council meeting was held in Sydney in 1962 (see photo on next page). As early as this first Council meeting, application was made to join the IFCC and so began a long and fruitful involvement in international activities which continues to this day. The other significant resolution of this first Council was that the Association should have an Annual Scientific Meeting (ASM) another activity that continues.

At the next Council meeting which was held in association with the first ASM, two

important decisions that would shape help shape the Association into the future were made, namely, the Association should work toward offering structured membership levels by examination and that there should be an Association publication. The examinations have developed into the highly sought-after and prestigious MAACB and FAACB and the Association now has a number of publications including The Clinical Biochemist Reviews, The Clinical Biochemist Newsletter and also periodically produces monographs on specialized subjects.

After all that early debate, the New Zealand Association (NZACB) officially joined the AACB in 1993 and the Association became The Australasian Association of Clinical Biochemists. Since that time NZ members have made a significant contribution to the AACB in all areas. 1993 also saw the AACB hosting a very successful IFCC Congress in Melbourne in 1993. In 2004, the Association hosted the 10th Asian-Pacific Congress of Clinical Biochemistry in Perth. Any history of the AACB cannot be considered without including the role the AACB has played in the development of quality in laboratories in Australia. Although the idea of establishing a QA program was part of the Foundation members' agenda, it was not until the 1970s largely through the efforts of Des Geary and Lloyd Penberthy that the RCPA-AACB Chemical Pathology QAP started. The history of the program and the cooperation between the RCPA and the AACB in its development can be found at <http://www.rcpaqap.com.au/chempath/qaphistory.cfm>. Many of the programs that are now part of the QAP have been developed by Working Parties initiated by AACB members and working under the auspices of the AACB.



Council - August 1962: F.C. Neale (President), R.S. Parsons (Tas), R.J. Bartholemew (NSW), M. Bick (Vic), G.A. Sarfaty (WA), W. Roman (SA), D.H. Curnow (Secretary), J.E. O'Hagan (Treasurer), M.J. Thomas (Qld)



AUSTRALIA 1961

Commencing in the early 80's, Barbara Fry provided secretarial support to Ron Bowyer, Honorary Federal Secretary and in the ensuing twenty years, this developed into a professional administration group located in Perth covering membership support, conference organization and publications. The Secretariat is now managed by the Chief Executive Officer, currently Tony Prior, who is also part of the AACB Executive.

Recently the decision has been made to relocate the office to Sydney over the next few years. The organizational structure has now developed to reflect the major activities of the Association which are professional affairs, education, publications and science.

As the Association celebrates its 50th year, it faces new challenges. Like in many other countries, Australian laboratories are increasingly having problems attracting suitable staff and how to manage our workforce has become an increasing focus for the Association. The foresight of the Founding Fathers in deciding the Association should offer Membership and Fellowships by examination has become integral in developing career paths for scientific laboratory staff. The other challenge is helping members to adapt and encompass new technologies and laboratory testing such as genetic testing and POCT which is being done through both the publications and specialised education seminars.

The success of the AACB over its first 50 years has been built on the members who have given their time and expertise voluntarily. As long as this continues, the Association will continue to flourish and remain at the leading edge of laboratory medicine in Australia. Further information on the AACB and its activities can be found at its website at <http://www.aacb.asn.au> and a comprehensive history of the first 40 years of the AACB written by Dr P Dennis which was the source of some of this material in this article can be found at <http://www.aacb.asn.au/aboutus/history>

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