

Deirdre Nerida Russell – a brief biography



Deirdre Russell (nee Holgate) was born in Sydney in 1941. While attending high school she decided to be a Speech Therapist (as the profession was called in those days). She was an exceptionally bright student at school and obtained a Commonwealth Scholarship when she completed her Leaving Certificate in 1958. She was subsequently selected, out of ten students in the state of NSW, to enter her training in Speech Therapy at the College of Speech Therapy. She completed her training in 1961.

Deirdre obtained her first position, as Speech Pathologist-in-Charge, at the Prince Henry Hospital in 1962 where she became involved with Professor Gavin Andrews in establishing the first Behavioural Token Economy Program for the treatment of stuttering. She was a co-author for three published papers on this work. At this time she became very interested in Aphasia and lectured part-time in Aphasia Theory and Therapeutics at the NSW Speech Pathology Training School from 1965. She also was Consultant sessional Speech Pathologist at NSW State Penitentiary, Long Bay, Sydney. As the only female health professional working with prisoners, Deirdre enjoyed the challenge of this part of her work and used her natural diplomacy and skill to manage the prison environment.

In 1969 she travelled to England where she broadened her clinical, teaching, academic and research experiences. She was appointed part-time Speech Pathologist-in-Charge at Barnet General Hospital, London. In 1970 she was appointed part-time Speech Pathologist-in-Charge at the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases at Maida Vale, London, which was part of a large neurological teaching hospital. She obtained a grant with Dr Maria Wyke (Research Neuropsychologist) and together they produced an important research paper on colour-naming defects in dysphasia patients. In 1971 she was appointed supervisor of final year studies at the West End School of Speech Pathology, London. In 1972 she accepted a sessional clinical position in Adult Aphasia and Dysarthria at the National Hospital, Queen's Square. In 1973 she was appointed Lecturer in Neurological Speech and Language Disorders at the National Hospital School of Speech Sciences. During her time in England, she gained the respect and friendship of leading English Speech Pathologists and Psychologists, working in her area of expertise.

In 1976, Deirdre returned to her family who resided in Newcastle and obtained a position as Deputy Speech Pathologists at Royal Newcastle Hospital and in

1977 she became a part-time lecturer and tutor in the Neuropsychology of Aphasia for the MSc Course in the Department of Psychology, University of Newcastle. In 1979 she married Mr Jack Russell and moved to Wollongong where Jack had been transferred.

In 1980, Deirdre was appointed as a Speech Pathologist at Port Kembla Hospital and in 1983 was promoted to Regional Advisor in Speech Pathology. In 1985 she was appointed Area Advisor in Speech Pathology for the Illawarra Area Health Service. She maintained her interest in teaching and was employed as a part-time lecturer in Aphasia at Cumberland College of Health Sciences in Speech Pathology. She developed and expanded the services of speech pathologists and was appointed Speech Pathologist-in-Charge at Illawarra Regional Hospital in 1991. In 1992 she was employed as a lecturer in Professional Issues in Speech Pathology at Cumberland College of Health Sciences. Deirdre had an excellent rapport with both her speech pathology and allied health colleagues and held a number of positions subsequently that focussed on her special abilities. These included Liaison Officer in Allied Health for the Institute of Rehabilitation and Allied Health, Illawarra Regional Hospital and AASH Casemix Representative in 1992. She was appointed Co-ordinator of Allied Health for the Institute of Rehabilitation and Allied Health, Illawarra Regional Hospital in 1993. From 1994 until her untimely death from cancer in 1997, she held the position of Acting Deputy Director of Allied Health for the Institute of Rehabilitation and Allied Health, Illawarra Regional Hospital. Deirdre enjoyed the administrative responsibilities of these posts and before she died mentioned that she had been looking forward to developing her ideas with her colleagues and staff.

Deirdre Russell was both a true professional and a remarkable person. For 35 years she devoted her work to helping patients with language disorders, to teaching and encouraging her students and to supporting and motivating her staff. She was also deeply interested in human beings and in her relationships always showed great intelligence, empathy, affection, humour, candour and generosity. Because she was a person with a unique combination of qualities, during her life she left a positive and strong influence on the lives of her patients, staff, colleagues, students, friends and family.