

## Interview with 2017 ANZSBT Life Membership recipient

**A/Prof. Merrole Cole-Sinclair BSc(Hons) MBBS FRACP FRCPA FFSc(RCPA)**

### Personal career/background

Dr Cole-Sinclair is an Australian trained clinical and laboratory haematologist, currently Head, Laboratory Haematology and chair of the hospital Transfusion Committee at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne; with an honorary appointment in the Department of Pathology at the University of Melbourne.



After graduating in the 1970's with a BSc(Hons) from the University of Melbourne majoring in Immunology and Pathology, she commenced PhD studies in cellular immunology but changed track to Medicine at Melbourne, ultimately completing training for RACP and RCPA Fellowships in Haematology at the Royal Melbourne and Alfred hospitals.

She then worked in Professor Victor Hoffbrand's Haematology Department as a clinical research fellow at the Royal Free Hospital in London examining molecular detection of minimal residual disease using clonal IgH rearrangements in lymphoid malignancies.

On her return to Australia she worked at the Alfred hospital in clinical haematology and pathology for a number of years until moving to her current position in 2008.

Dr Cole-Sinclair has had a number of roles with the RCPA and RACP over many years including membership of the Written Examination Committee (RACP), Assistant and Chief Examiner in Haematology (RCPA), membership and Chair of the Joint Specialist Advisory Committee for Haematology (RACP/RCPA, now CJCT), membership and Chair of the Haematology Advisory Committee (RCPA) and membership of the RCPA Board. She has also served as Chair of the Transfusion Outcomes Research collaborative (TORC), on the Victorian Serious Transfusion Incident Reporting system group and The Victorian Blood User group; and is a member of the National Pathology Accreditation Advisory Council, ANSZBT, AABB and ISBT and other local and overseas specialist societies.

### Career highlights

Highlights of Dr Cole-Sinclair's work have included the privilege and at times challenges of direct patient care, the opportunity to work with talented and caring medical, nursing, scientific, quality, research, administrative, government and College staff to achieve improvements for patient care and safety in the hospital environment and also education and training for health professionals in Haematology and transfusion. A particular pleasure has been to help to provide a sound basis in clinical and laboratory Haematology skills for doctors training to be haematologists and to be involved particularly in their early professional development. Formal roles in trainee assessment and examination processes have enabled her to emphasise and embed knowledge and skill in transfusion science and clinical practice into curricula and assessments for basic physician and Haematology trainees.

She has been involved in and enjoyed for many years formal and informal teaching of medical and science students, and junior and senior medical staff about Haematology and transfusion.

Involvement in the TORC collaboration (a partnership between the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at Monash University and the Blood Service of the Australian Red Cross) from 2008 has also been a very gratifying experience, especially in light of the expanding and high quality contributions that the TORC partners and other research groups in Australia and NZ have made to the evidence-base in various important areas of transfusion practice.

## **Transfusion Journey**

Dr Cole-Sinclair's initial exposure to transfusion was during her immunology studies where transfusion serology was used as a practical demonstration of antigen/antibody interaction and detection. The students' personal blood groups were investigated using tiles and her own blood group was deemed to be 'interesting', the demonstrator taking her specimen away for further analysis!

During her junior resident years she realised that transfusion, although considered by some to be a routine ancillary supportive therapy was in fact a unique, important and widely used therapy not without major risk. Having to investigate and manage an ABO incompatible transfusion reaction as a laboratory registrar due to inadequate patient/component identification and matching in the operating theatre also made a significant and lasting impression. It was clear that systems were not adequate to minimise risk of particularly identification error or provide open disclosure in those days. Despite many improvements the risk of a potentially fatal error remains.

She also recalls the somewhat stressful overnight manual cross-matching that was the responsibility of haematology trainees in many hospitals in those years....

There is sometimes little appreciation by the users of blood of the expertise and complex systems in place to maximise the benefit and safety of transfusion and to minimise clinical risk. All of us in the business of providing blood and transfusion advice should use every opportunity to educate staff, patients, carers etc about the importance of safe transfusion practice across the entire transfusion chain and the positive aspects of blood donation for the good of the whole community.

## **Views on blood transfusion and patient outcomes**

Improvement in transfusion practice as a result of contributions from basic and laboratory medical science, medicine, nursing, expert groups and regulatory agencies has and will continue to come from dedicated people meticulously researching, reporting and applying the best quality evidence for the best clinical outcomes. While national guidelines for transfusion and patient blood management support the current quite appropriate paradigm of good practice and avoidance of transfusion wherever possible, we sometimes need to remind ourselves of the significant benefits of transfusion and ensure that patients who would benefit and should be transfused actually receive this therapy.

There is also the question of equity of access to safe transfusion on a global scale where there is much improvement underway and still a huge amount to be achieved; this gap is of course not confined just to transfusion.

## **Final words**

Dr Cole-Sinclair would like to sincerely thank the ANZSBT for the awarding of life membership of the Society and wish the ANZSBT the very best in its important current and future work in the various aspects of transfusion in Australasia.