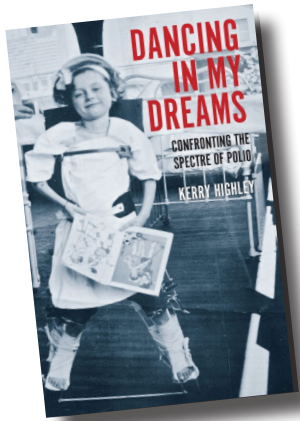


POLIO IN AUSTRALIA

Joan L. Headley, Executive Director, Post-Polio Health International



D*ancing in my Dreams: Confronting the Spectre of Polio* was written by Kerry Highley, who received her PhD in the History of Medicine from the Australian National University for her thesis on the polio epidemics in Australia.

Released in November 2015, the book documents the polio story of Australia, tracing the disease throughout the country noting that the first official epidemic was in 1895.

The bulk of the book details the lives and work of two Australian women who held opposing views on the treatment of acute poliomyelitis. The well-known Sister Elizabeth Kenny championed and practiced the treatment of hot packs and movement early in recovery. Dr Jean Macnamara advocated bed rest and immobilization of affected limbs in a neutral position. As Highley explains, “In pre-Second World War Australia, the public’s reverence of the medical profession entrenched Mcnamara’s approach until well after most Western countries had abandoned it.”

The book contains several pages of excellent historic photographs. Polio survivors are quoted in the Introduction and Chapter 2, “I’m Afraid It’s Polio ...,” setting the stage for the historic chapters that follow. For example, the search for the method of transmission of the poliovirus and the quest for the vaccine is told in Chapter 8, “A Tale of Brains, Guts and a Virus.”

Post-Polio in Australia

The Annex features two charts. One was compiled by the author from Reports of the Director General of Health, Commonwealth of Australia for 1915-1963. It lists the number of reported cases for those years for each of the eight states and territories, with a total of 30,977. Australia’s incidence rate per 100,000 population in 1951-1953 was 32.30. During that same time period, Denmark recorded 59.90; Canada, 35.90; Sweden, 28.50; US, 26.00.

Polio Australia was established in 2008 when the existing support groups, some of which had been established in the late 1980s, and State networks agreed to formally incorporate. In 2010, they hired a National Program Manager, Mary-ann Liethof, who works full time today.

Polio Australia has organized six Polio Health and Wellness Retreats for Australia’s survivors and have developed a comprehensive website at www.polioaustralia.org.au.

Their years of collaboration and hard work has resulted in an international conference to be held in Sydney, September 22-24, 2016.



The theme of the 2016 Australasia-Pacific Post-Polio Conference is “Polio: Life Stage Matters.” Because the health issues for ageing polio survivors and young polio survivors differ, the aim of the Conference is to exchange knowledge about the diagnosis and treatment of the post-polio condition in different age groups to best preserve functioning throughout life.

The Conference will provide sessions for both polio survivors and healthcare providers, emphasizing research results and gold standard evidence-based clinical practice. Since care for polio survivors involves many different disciplines, the conference will target professionals in the fields of rehabilitation medicine, virology, neurology, orthopedic surgery, allied health and students in these areas. ■

For more information and to register, visit www.cvent.com/events/post-polio-conference/event-summary-c063c19139614fc19674931eec705932.aspx or contact Polio Australia Incorporated, PO Box 500, Kew East Victoria 3102, Suite 119C, 89 High Street South, Kew 3101, Australia, +61 3 9016 7678.