



Linda Bryder

Making history: drawing on a personal archive to understand developments in neonatal care in late twentieth-century New Zealand

Neonatal paediatrician Dr Ross Howie was the clinician who worked with Sir Graham Liggins in his world-famous corticosteroid trials in the early 1970s. This work ultimately led to the saving of the lives of thousands of premature infants worldwide and became the inspiration for the founding of the Cochrane Collaboration for evidence-based medicine in Britain. Howie modestly told a 2004 Wellcome-funded Witness Seminar that, ‘I just happened to be around at the time,’ though he also commented that he ‘helped design the trial, supervised the collection of data and did all the work of analysing them’. Yet little has been written about his contributions to this important trial or indeed his experiences during a significant time for the development of the specialism of neonatology more broadly; for example, he authored a government report on neonatal services in 1982. For this presentation, I draw upon his personal archive, yet to be deposited, to revisit his career in neonatal care after joining the staff of Auckland’s National Women’s Hospital in 1962, to his retirement in 1995, and his ongoing monitoring and commentary on developments thereafter. Howie did not just care for babies (significant though that was in the formative days of neonatology), he was a prolific and reflective writer on the health system more broadly. This paper ‘makes history’ by investigating a hitherto little-known figure in New Zealand’s medical and healthcare history, and draws on his astute observations to cast light on developments in neonatal care and maternity in late twentieth-century New Zealand.