

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE0307

Siedlecky, Stefania Winifred

(1921 - 2016)

Born 25 March, 1921, Blackheath New South Wales Australia

Died 31 December, 2016, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Occupation Medical practitioner

Summary

Stefania Siedlecky was one of the first two women medical officers to work at St. Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, New South Wales (NSW). A general practitioner with a particular interest in women's health, she was influential in the development of the family planning movement in NSW, joining Family Planning NSW in 1971. In 1974 she helped set up the Leichhardt (NSW) Women's Health Centre and the Preterm Foundation, two initiatives which brought safe legal abortion to NSW. From these beginnings, she developed a national, then international, reputation. In 1986 she joined the United Nations Family Planning Association (UNFPA) Special Advisory Committee on Women, Population and Development and in 1988 conducted a review of the UNFPA program in Zambia.

Details

Stefania Siedlecky was born in Blackheath 1921, daughter of a Polish migrant. She graduated in Medicine during the war years at the beginning of the era of antibiotics and blood transfusions and was one of the first two women RMOs at St. Vincent's Hospital in Sydney. She spent nearly 30 years in general practice and was on the gynaecology staff at Rachel Forster Hospital in Sydney 1960-1974. She joined Family Planning NSW in 1971 and in 1974 helped set up the Leichhardt Women's Health Centre and the Preterm Foundation, two initiatives which brought safe legal abortion to NSW.

In 1974 she became the Consultant in Family Planning in the Commonwealth Department of Health, initially for six months, but stayed on as Senior Adviser in Family Planning and Women's Health for 12 years. She was responsible for the establishment of the Action Centre for Adolescents in Melbourne, the Warehouse and the Fairfield Multicultural Centre in Sydney, an education program in family planning, and the first National Women's Health Conference in 1975. In 1978 she took the MSc in Medical Demography at London University, and in 1979 was seconded to the organising committee for the UN Mid-Decade Conference for Women. She was a member of the Australian delegation to the UN Mid-Decade Conference (Copenhagen 1980), the International Conference on Population (Mexico 1984) and the UN End of the Decade for Women Conference (Nairobi 1985).

On retirement in 1986, she joined the UNFPA Special Advisory Committee on Women, Population and Development and in 1988 did a review of the UNFPA program in Zambia. She joined the board of the Family Planning Association in ACT and later in NSW (1987-2000) where she was President for 2 years. She set up the FP NSW Ethics Committee which she chaired from 1987 to 2000. She represented Australia on the ESEAOR Council from 1989-95 and helped to establish its women's sub-committee. In 1990, with co-author Diana Wyndham, she published, 'Populate and Perish-Australian Women's Fight for Birth Control.' She is on the Board of the Preterm Foundation and a member of several women's organisations.

In 1989 she joined Macquarie University as an Honorary Associate in Demography where she participates in epidemiological research and teaching. She has written papers on teenage pregnancy, contraceptive use and abortion and contributed to international publications. With Professor Farhat Yusuf she has published a number of papers on aspects of women's health and contraceptive use, most recently a review of 30 years of abortion in South Australia (in press).

In 1987 she was awarded the Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to Women's Health.

Described as 'a true legend in women's health and in our community', Dr Siedlecky was a founder of Australia's women's health movement and trailblazer. Over fifty years, through her intelligence, passion and commitment to medicine and women's health, she had a significant and lasting impact on thousands of women's lives and Australia's health system and academia.

[NB: the above biography was researched and written by Philida Sturgiss-Hoy]

Published resources

Edited Book

Who's Who of Australian Women, Lofthouse, Andrea, 1982

Resource

Where are the Women in Australian science?, Australian Science and Technology Heritage Centre, 2003, <http://www.austehc.unimelb.edu.au/wisa/wisa.html>

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Author Details

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