

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6058

Byrne, Helen Elizabeth

(1910 - 1998)

Born 1 January, 1910

Died 31 December, 1998

Occupation Doctor, Physician

Summary

Helen Elizabeth Byrne graduated with an MBBS (Honours) in 1947, after which she worked at various hospitals in both Victoria and London. In 1961 she qualified as a member of the Royal Australian College of Physicians and until 1966, was appointed an honorary physician to out-patients at the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital. In addition to working as a clinical assistant and an assistant physician, Helen held a university appointment as a clinical tutor at the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Details

Helen Elizabeth Byrne did not study Medicine as her first choice. She initially took her MA in French and Italian studies and, graduating in 1933, won the W.T. Mollison Scholarship, using it to travel to Perugia to undertake the course in Italian literature and art offered to foreign students at the Università per Stranieri and to Rome where studied at La Sapienza. She noted on her return that the buildings in Rome were shabby and 'The hand of Mussolini is very much in evidence in the universities, for no criticism of the Fascist regime is tolerated.'^[1] She gave a talk on 3LO ABC in 1935 on 'Some Things We Could Learn from the Italians'.^[2]

In 1942 she began studies towards the MBBS she took with Honours in 1947 and worked at the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital before going to London in 1950, spending two years at the Postgraduate Medical School, Hammersmith and various other London hospitals. After two years back at the Queen Victoria, she joined Claire Crittle (1921-2006) in general practice in Burwood. She qualified as a Member of the Royal Australian College of Physicians in 1961 and was appointed as an honorary physician to Out-patients at the Queen Victoria until 1966. She was also Clinical Assistant at St Vincent's Hospital in 1961 and Assistant Physician at Royal Melbourne Hospital from 1963 until her retirement which coincided with the end of the honorary system in Victoria in 1975. At the Royal Melbourne she held a university appointment as clinical tutor to fourth year medical and dental students and served as Acting Honorary Physician to Outpatients in 1967 and 1968.

Helen Byrne's Italian proved a great benefit in dealing with newly arrived migrants and she learned Modern Greek to be able to communicate with others. She was a member of the Australian Medical Association, the Victorian Medical Women's Society and the Lyceum Club, which she joined in 1932. She was also a devout Roman Catholic. The College Roll of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons tells us that 'She made a quiet and self-effacing but significant contribution to the medical and cultural life of her era.'^[3]

^[1] 'Home from Italy: Miss Helen Byrne'. *Argus*. 4 May 1934:10.

^[2] *Argus* 2 May 1938: 15.

^[3] M. Henderson. 'College Roll: Byrne, Helen Elizabeth'. <https://www.racp.edu.au/page/library/college-roll/college-roll-detail&id=2> (no longer available online).

Published resources

Book

40 Years 40 Women: Biographies of University of Melbourne Women, Published to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the International Year of Women, Flesch, Juliet, 2015,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/4040/>

Author Details

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