

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE23090849

Whitworth, Judith Ann AC

(1944 -)

Born 1 April, 1944, Melbourne Victoria Australia

Occupation Medical researcher

Summary

Emeritus Professor Judith Whitworth AC MB, BS, MD, PhD, DSc, FRACP, FAATSE, FAAHMS is an internationally renowned medical researcher in the fields of kidney function and blood pressure. From 1968 to 1991 she worked as physician and nephrologist in hospitals in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney and overseas in Paris and London. In 1997 she was the first woman to be appointed Chief Medical Officer of Australia, and from 1999 to 2009 she served as Director of the John Curtin School of Medical Research and Howard Florey professor of Medical Research at the Australian National University (ANU). Whitworth has had an extensive involvement in national organisations and professional bodies over many decades. In honour of her longtime support to women in science the Judith Whitworth Fellowship for Gender Equity was established in 2014, based at the ANU. She was the ACT Australian of the Year for 2004.

Judith Whitworth was inscribed on the ACT Women's Honour Roll in 2004.

Details

Judith Whitworth was born in Melbourne on 1 April 1944. Attracted to a career in medicine as a result of a long hospital stay with polio as a child, she graduated from the University of Melbourne with a bachelor's degree in medicine in 1967, and Doctor of Medicine in 1974. Whitworth worked as a physician and nephrologist at the Royal Melbourne Hospital between 1968 and 1991, interspersed with periods at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Adelaide (1972), the Tenon Hospital in Paris (1973–74), and Guy's Hospital in London (1974–75). Her interest in medical research was ignited early, through a fellowship (1975–77) as a clinical researcher in the Howard Florey Institute of Experimental Physiology and Medicine in Melbourne, culminating in award of a PhD in 1978.

From 1991 to 1997 Whitworth served as Head of the Department of Medicine at the St George Hospital in Sydney and (till 1999) as Professor of Medicine at the University of New South Wales. During this period she also chaired (1994–96) the Medical Research Committee of the National Health and Medical Research Council. She was appointed the Chief Medical Officer for the Commonwealth in 1997, the first woman to be so. From 1999 to 2009 she served as Director of the John Curtin School of Medical Research and Howard Florey Professor of Medical Research at the Australian National University (ANU). Since then, as emeritus professor, she has continued her research into the mechanisms of high blood pressure, and her involvement with key professional bodies in Australia and overseas.

Whitworth has made major contributions in three key areas. Her research overturned conventional understandings of how anti-inflammatory steroid hormones raise blood pressure and led to development of safer, more effective medications. In developing Australian and international clinical guidelines for dealing with hypertension, her research has aided in slowing progression of chronic kidney disease and improving management of hypertension. Her work has helped heighten awareness of the need for evidence-based research in the formulation of health policy. She has published over 500 scientific publications and held over 20 visiting professorships and lectureships throughout the world.

In 2001 she was made a Companion in the Order of Australia (AC) for her 'service to the advancement of academic medicine and as a major contributor to research policy and medical research administration in Australian and internationally'. From 2005 to 2011 she chaired the World Health Organisation Global Advisory Committee on Health Research. Throughout her career Whitworth has played very active leadership roles in a considerable number of professional organisations, including Australian Society of Medical Research, the Royal Australian College of Physicians, the International Society of Nephrology, the International Society of Hypertension, the High Blood Pressure Research Council of Australia, the Australia and New Zealand Society of Nephrology, and the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia. In addition, she served on the Board of Therapeutic Innovation Australia and chaired its Clinical Trials Infrastructure Committee. Through such bodies and in her own hospital and university positions, she became a generous and exemplary role model and mentor for young scientists and doctors, especially young women. In 2014 her support for women in science was honoured by the ACT Government which established the Judith Whitworth Fellowship for Gender Equity in Science at the ANU. Its purpose is to encourage and reward early and mid-career scientists who have taken time away from their academic career to raise children. In addition to the AC, Whitworth's contributions to medical science and academic leadership have been recognised through awards including the Howard Florey Medal (1990), the Australian Centenary Medal (2001), and the Curtin Medal (2010); and honorary degrees from the University of Sydney (2004), University of Glasgow (2008), Charles Darwin University (2011), and the University of Melbourne (2012). She was elected Honorary Fellow of the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences (2015), and Fellow of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (2008).

Whitworth's contributions have also been recognised outside her academic and hospital environments. In 2002 she was appointed the Telstra ACT Business Woman of the Year. In 2003 she received the Centenary Medal from the Australian Government. In 2004 she was made Australian of the Year for the ACT. At the same time she was appointed ACT Ambassador for Women, and Ambassador for Canberra.

Published resources

University of Melbourne: Citation for the Sir William Upjohn Medal (2020) for Professor Judith Whitworth AC, <https://mdhs.unimelb.edu.au/engage/community/awards-and-honours/professor-judith-whitworth-ac>:

University of Sydney: Citation for the award of Doctor of Medicine Honoris Causa to Professor Judith Ann Whitworth (2004)

Australian National University: Professor Judith Whitworth, winner of the 2010 Curtin Medal, <https://cosdev6.anu.edu.au/about-us/awards-prizes/professor-judith-whitworth>

Charles Darwin University: Citation for the award of Doctor of Letters Honoris Causa (2011), <https://www.cdu.edu.au/about-cdu/leadership-structure/strategic-services-governance/university-council-committees/honorary-awards>

Judith Whitworth Fellowship for Gender Equity in Science established at the John Curtin School of Medical Research, 2014, <https://citynews.com.au/2014/judith-whitworth-fellowship-gender-equity-science-established-john-curtin-school-medical-research>

Researchers praise first fellowship for scientists raising children, Carl Smith, 2014, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-07-23/science-praise-fellowship-for-raising-children/5618386>

Author Details

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