

Memorial - Hal Kendig

It is a great pleasure and honour to be asked by Barbara and Wendy to commence the memorial tributes to my great friend and long term colleague - Hal Kendig - one of Australia's leading gerontologists.

Hal spent his whole working life in and around the study of older people in our society - their increasing longevity, their contributions, their housing and neighbourhoods, their community settings, their needs, and their families' needs. His focus was on three things: - the *triumph of population ageing* rather than the problems – the *major role of families in providing care* - and the *role and responsibility of the state to support family care in a comprehensive and equitable way*. His research took place as family structures changed around us - as the baby boomer cohort grew older - as fertility and family size declined - and as women entered the workforce in ever increasing numbers - with a job, a couple of kids to bring up *and* a couple of ageing parents to watch over and support.

Hal came to Australia and the ANU from California - via UCL Davis and the University of Southern California's famous Andrus Gerontology Centre and School of Urban studies - arriving here in 1975 with Wendy and their two young daughters, Cathy and Caralee – Michael coming along a bit later. Hal had majored in undergraduate sociology, Mastered in urban planning with a PhD on *Neighbourhood conditions of the aged: Urban change and Public Policy*. So - he was well equipped to take up a 15 year role in the ANU Urban Research Unit and to head the Schools Ageing and the Family Project from 1980 to 86.

Hal's magnum opus from his first years at the ANU - was his first book "*New life for old suburbs*" published in 1979. However I came to know Hal best through reading and admiring his work in the Ageing and the Family Project – resulting in his next two books, "*Greying Australia*" written with John McCallum and "*Ageing and Families*", Edited by Hal with Chapters by Don Rowland, Diane Gibson, John McCallum, Victor Minichello among other AAG alumni.

Hal had a focus on achieving better outcomes for older-old people as the baby boomers grew old - with those aged 80 to 85 years peaking in the coming decades. This is the group we define as the very-old with high rates of age-related disability, dependency, cognitive decline and dementia. However - once the predicted 300% increase in numbers of very old by mid-century finally got the attention of our politicians, economists, productivity commissions and hospital oriented health providers - many saw doom and disaster ahead.

It was always Hal's role to bring the focus back to *Ageing Well*, its social determinants over the lifespan, and to prevention and self-management of chronic diseases – recently reviewed in an important paper by Hal and Stephen Duckett. Hal saw Population ageing as a natural transition with Australia having time to handle that transition well - given the correct approach.

So it was a double shock for his own family, friends, colleagues - and for all of us - when this mighty man was brought down prematurely - in his late 60s - before he got even close to old age as we now define it. He was taken by a rare form of one of the neurodegenerative disorders that become common only with advanced ageing. It was important for Hal however, that his *Multi System Atrophy* caused progressive *physical* disability and that he was able to work on productively - passing away only a month after celebrating his 70th birthday with his family.

Hal and I had a number of things in common in the early AAG days - from the mid 1970s - despite appearing to be at opposite poles of the Gerontology world. Hal was of course a social gerontologist steeped in community values, the rights of older people and the social determinants of healthy ageing whereas - after completing a first degree in the Social Sciences - I had gone to the dark side, trained as a Geriatrician and Neurologist in brain structure and function and the neurobiology of ageing. Our common ground became the lifespan social determinants of ageing well and of brain ageing.

We also had in common: **Firstly** - a mutual friend and mentor in the great Sidney Sax. Sid trained Gary Andrews and myself in Geriatric Medicine at Lidcombe Hospital in the 1960s - and - as the first Director of Geriatrics for NSW Health - Sid organized our fellowships in Gerontology & Epidemiology at the University of Glasgow in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

By the time Hal arrived in Canberra - in 1975 - Sid had taken major roles in *Health and Ageing* in the Federal Government. He became a close friend & mentor to Hal – appreciative of his population based work on Ageing and Families and advancing Hal's influence on government ageing policy.

Secondly - as epidemiologists - Hal brought my attention to normal ageing and to a population based approach - valuing people over their pathology and their diseases, taking a life-course view, and emphasising population ageing as a triumph rather than a threat.

Thirdly - Hal's work and publications from the Ageing and the Family Project introduced me to the major role of Australian families in the support of their older people. Key to this understanding was his Ageing & Family Study showing the relative rarity of isolation and lack of family contact for older Australians. This was reinforced by our own findings in the Sydney Older Persons Study in the 1990s.

Hal's work also reinforced the view that the proper role of government in the care of very-old dependent people is to support individuals within their family structures - not in isolation. We will greatly miss Hal's sage advice during the evolution of the current Aged Care Reform as we try to solve its problems in supporting the very-old in the community.

Finally - departing a little from my brief to cover his early years - I want to pay a personal tribute to Hal for starting off our funding at Neura for our studies on Aboriginal Health & Ageing. From his role in leading the *ARC NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well* Hal provided a seed grant in 2007 that led to the longitudinal Koori Growing Old Well study, now entering its third wave.

Hal was indeed a great man - supporting and mentoring many people over his brilliant gerontology career. It has been a great pleasure focusing on the early years. Julie Byles will now take up the story.