
OBITUARY

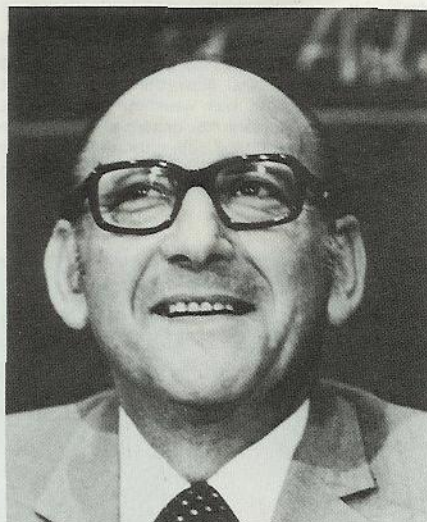
Pincus Taft MB BS, MD, FRACP

Pincus Taft, a doyen among Australian endocrinologists and physicians, died on 11 January 1993. To his wife, Tamara, and daughters, Lisa and Jenny, and their families, we extend our heartfelt condolences for their profound loss.

Pincus Taft was born in St Kilda in June 1920 and after education at Ripponlea State School, Elwood Central School and Melbourne High School, studied medicine at Melbourne University, graduating in 1942 after an abbreviated war-time course. He was then a resident medical officer and registrar at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, followed by active service in the Solomon Islands and New Britain in the AIF.

He returned to the Royal Melbourne Hospital in 1947 and gained the MRACP and MD(Melb) in 1949. In 1950-1951 he was an exchange fellow at Western Reserve University Medical School, Lakeside Hospital, Cleveland, Ohio, in association with Dr Max Miller. After this period of postgraduate training in America he returned to the Royal Melbourne Hospital as Senior Honorary Physician in diabetes and endocrinology, a position which he held until 1963. He held a similar appointment at the Royal Women's Hospital from 1953 to 1974. From 1963 to 1978 he was Physician-in-Charge at the Ewen Downie Metabolic Unit, Alfred Hospital and Associate Professor of Medicine at Monash University. From 1979 to 1985 he was Senior Visiting Endocrinologist at St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne.

He was foundation Secretary-Treasurer of the Endocrine Society of Australia in 1958-1960 and was President of that society in 1968-1970 as well as being elected President of the Australian Diabetes Society in 1978-1980. He was foundation Chairman of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians Specialist Advisory Committee in Endocrinology and Convenor of the Medical Advisory Panel to the Diabetes Foundation, Victoria for 15 years.



This factual account of his distinguished career is somewhat dry without an appreciation, firstly, of his place in the pattern of his family history, and secondly, of his influence on the development of medicine and endocrinology in Australia. Many younger colleagues decided to follow him into endocrinology after observing his style of medical practice, both clinical and scientific.

The Taft family came to Australia from Ukraine over the period 1906 to 1922. Pincus' father, Misha, emigrated initially to New York where he trained as a pharmacist, and was active in that profession after coming to Australia in 1909. Of the eight Taft siblings who emigrated to Australia, two women were already medical graduates from Geneva, one of whom had been in charge of a Russian field hospital in World War I. They were not able to obtain medical registration in Australia without repeating their whole training, a restriction which persisted for many decades. Over three generations, there have been more than a dozen medical graduates in the extended Taft family.

Throughout his career Pincus served as a role model for many young physicians who decided to make endocrinology their calling, inspired by his characteristics of human compassion, clinical acumen and scientific excitement. The list is long, but some of those who were influenced early in their careers include: Ian Martin, Kevin Catt (National Institutes of Health, Bethesda), Ian Burr (Vanderbilt University Medical School), Gordon Ennis, Jim Stockigt, David de Kretser, Donald Cameron, Paul Zimmet, Richard Dargaville, Denis Engler and Duncan Topliss. Innumerable others who have entered a wide range of fields have been influenced by him in their training and professional development.

On 14 December 1992, over 150 colleagues and friends from all over Australia attended a symposium and dinner in his honour in Melbourne; the President of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Professor Alex Cohen, travelled from Perth to be guest speaker. Dr Taft's contribution to the art and science of endocrinology was never more clear, in particular his influence in propelling Australia to the forefront in diabetes, reproductive medicine, clinical research and endocrinology in general. His humility, fortitude and optimistic persona pervaded this event so strongly that feelings of warmth and gratitude were finely balanced against the sense of impending loss.

He gave unstinting service and made distinguished contributions to numerous institutions and professional bodies, but was never seduced into the bureaucracy of medicine. He did not retire from practice and retained his direct fascination with humanity, as reflected by interactions with patients, students and colleagues, medical and non-medical, right into his final illness. His practice of medicine in its broadest sense was reflected in patient care, teaching and an active interest in scientific advancement. To have known him in any of these capacities is a continuing privilege.

J R STOCKIGT