

2011 USUKAA AWARD LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Dr Peg Belson MBE BA Syd PhD (Hon) *Wheelock*



Peg Belson receives the inaugural USUKAA Alumni Award for Lifetime Achievement in recognition of her outstanding voluntary contributions over 60 years, in the UK and abroad, in the field of children's welfare in hospitals including the establishment of the Action for Sick Children Association.

In 1959 The Ministry of Health had published the Platt Report requiring hospitals to implement major changes in the non-medical care of children in hospital. It made 54 recommendations, the most significant being that visiting to all children should be unrestricted, that mothers should be able to stay with young children and that the training of medical and nursing staff should include the emotional and social needs of children and families. Since 1952, through his contrasting documentary films, *A Two Year Old Goes to Hospital* and *Going to Hospital With Mother* James Robertson, a psychiatric social worker from the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, had been promoting such a pattern of care to doctors and nurses with only limited success. Nor was the Ministry any more successful in gaining a more humane pattern of care for sick children. At that time children faced long, lonely stays in hospital. Visiting hours were very short, sometimes as little as an hour

twice a week and for some conditions non-existent. Parents were discouraged from visiting. It was thought they might bring infection into the ward and "their visits evidently upset the children who, if left to themselves, would quickly settle down and soon forget about home". At that time a health correspondent could confidently state that "the vast majority of hospitals seemed oblivious to the enormous amount of suffering they put upon children and their parents by rules which break important relationships necessary for the maintenance of good mental health".

In 1961 James Robertson brought the Platt recommendations to public notice with a series of articles in the *Observer* and a forthright programme on BBC TV based on his films. Contrary to instructions he asked viewers to write to him about what happened when their children were in hospital and urged community action to improve conditions for sick children. Peg was one of the Battersea mothers who heeded his call and under his guidance set up a group, initially called *Mother Care for Children in Hospital*, which in 1965 changed to NAWCH – the National Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital. Within a few short years NAWCH was a UK-wide organisation with over fifty branches, a Central Office and a Government grant.

During the past 50 years going into hospital for children has changed beyond recognition. In the main children are cared for by qualified staff on children's wards where parents are welcome at any time, sleep near their child and take part in their care, hospital play specialists help to make the experience more meaningful and enduring and wards are bright and suitably decorated.

With her colleagues Peg has played a significant role in helping to bring about these changes. She has been a committee member and office-bearer in NAWCH (now Action for Sick Children), a member of official enquiries and

represented Action for Sick Children on other national organisations.

As a lecturer and writer and as a health authority member she has been able to persuade others to take up the cause. She has carried out many national surveys of hospital facilities for children, which have gained wide press coverage and formed part of official reports. These surveys have included facilities for parents, numbers of children's trained doctors, nurses and hospital play specialists and numbers of children being nursed in adult wards as well as the availability of children's emergency services, dedicated adolescent care and of education for sick children.

In addition to helping to improve care in the UK she has helped to introduce similar programmes for family involvement and play to other countries by visiting and teaching in hospitals overseas and by arranging teaching visits to UK hospitals for enthusiastic groups of overseas staff. These contacts have included Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Malta, Finland, West Germany, Denmark, Japan, China, Kuwait, the Czech Republic, Poland and Bosnia. She was associated with the setting up of EACH, the European Association for Children in Hospital in 1992, the development of the EACH Charter for Children in Hospital. She represents Action for Sick Children on EACH and is currently its secretary.

Since 1964 she has been associated with the development of play in hospital. With Dr Charlotte Williamson she established the Play in Hospital Liaison Committee and has taught on three of the training programmes for Hospital Play Specialists. She is a Vice-President of the National Association for Hospital Play Staff and Advisor to Action for Sick Children. She has assisted in the programme of family centred care and hospital play in the Czech Republic since 1992.

Her early interest, gained in the USA, in children with HIV led her to join CWAC –

THE USUKAA ALUMNI AWARDS



the Children With AIDS Charity – at its foundation in 1992, chairing it from 2000 to 2010, steering it to become a very effective source of help for the many UK children infected and affected with HIV-AIDS whose difficulties should not be underrated.

Medical advances have seen HIV become more a chronic than a terminal illness but social care is far behind. These children may, from an early age, experience extreme poverty, stigma, bereavement, adoption and fostering, while maintaining a strict medication regime with long or short term side effects and enduring hospital stays while the need to maintain

complete confidentiality regarding their health status can bring social isolation. CWAC offers these children and their families financial help, respite breaks, work experience and transport to hospital, provides sexual health programmes in schools and clubs, publishes a journal and runs a resource and campaign centre.

Other interests include child accident prevention, facilities for under-fives and programmes for disabled children. She has served on health authorities and community health councils and undertaken other patient representational roles during nearly

sixty years of fulfilling voluntary endeavour for children and young people. Currently she is vice-chair of USUKAA and closely involved in the moves to change the NHS.

She was awarded an MBE In 1973, elected an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health in 1993 and was awarded an honorary PhD in 2003 by Wheelock College in Boston with whom she ran a summer school in London from 1978 to 2005.



THE USUKAA ALUMNI AWARD



We are launching the USUKAA Alumni Award to recognise the outstanding contributions and achievements made by individuals in the University of Sydney's UK-based alumni community. The Award has been launched with the presentation of a Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr Peg Belson MBE BA *Syd* PhD (Hon) *Wheelock*

From 2012 each year USUKAA will present one award from any one of the four following categories:

- Community Achievement,
- International Achievement,
- Professional Achievement or
- Young Alumni Achievement

For further information and nomination forms, visit sydney.edu.au/alumni/usukaa-award or email alumni.uk@sydney.edu.au.

Nominations close on Friday 30 March 2012

Entries received will also be considered for the University's Alumni Awards program.