



In Memoriam

A/PROF PHYLLIS LAU



Vale Phyllis Lau

Phyllis was a valued member of our Department with a strong reputation for the energy, passion and enthusiasm she put into all her work. She was a force, determined to build primary care research.

She commenced working in our Department 20 years ago as a Research Assistant, not long after she completed her PhD at Monash University on adverse drug reactions in oncology. Prior to this she had completed a Bachelor of Pharmacy and a Graduate Diploma in Drug Evaluation and Pharmaceutical Sciences. Phyllis grew to become the Deputy Lead of the Diabetes and Cardiometabolic Disease Research Group (2014 to 2020). From 2014 until November 2025 she was our Graduate Research Coordinator, assisting Professor Meredith Temple-Smith with research training and mentoring of GR students.

She was one of the first academics in our Department to undertake research with the Aboriginal Community and collaborators to improve the cultural safety of general practice, and she was a Closing the Gap Consultant for General Practice Victoria in 2012. She later went on to develop cultural awareness programs for medical students.

From her first position in our Department, she became the Statewide Co-ordinator of the Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development Program (2006-7), which provided federal funding to promote primary care research. This gave her the opportunity to both broaden her research interests and attend conferences held by the Australasian Association of Academic Primary Care. She later went on to serve this national organisation in a number of roles, including Treasurer (2016-19), Vice President (2019-20) and then President from 2020 to 2023.

Phyllis moved to Western Sydney University School of Medicine in the COVID years from 2021. She was soon promoted to Associate Professor. She maintained her fractional appointment with our Department as the Graduate Research Coordinator and student/supervisor mentor. She also held an Honorary Associate Professorship in the Melbourne Dental School where she had a strong collaboration around oral health.

She was the convenor for the AAAPC Annual Research Conference in 2024, which was considered by all who attended to be an excellent conference. Phyllis was passionate about primary care research for all: medical, nursing, allied health and pharmacy as well as for non-clinical primary care researchers. She was a strong advocate for inter-professional collaboration.

Recently she was a driver to establish a practice based research network for NSW and was thus the founder and the first Committee Chair of the NSW-ACT Practice-Based Research Alliance (NAPRA) 2024.

Phyllis successfully supervised a great many research projects and students in the areas of her interests, including health service delivery, Indigenous health, cultural sensitivity in health communication, interprofessional collaboration in care and research, and chronic disease detection and management.

Over the years, she has been awarded more than \$17M in research funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP). In 2025 alone, she was a Chief Investigator on four newly successful grants including two funded by the Medical Research Futures Fund (MRFF). She has over 100 publications to her name.

A major contributor to the training of honours, medical and graduate research students, Phyllis was an excellent advocate and mentor for students – she always went the extra mile. Even as she faced her own health challenges, she sought funding for and established GR-Connect for our Department.

This initiative aims to maintain the connection between graduate research students and our Department and provides networking, mentoring and internship opportunities for current students by linking them with a network of former students.

For several years pre-COVID, Phyllis led our international observership program, which encourages novice primary care practitioners from overseas to learn from the Australian experience. She not only delivered introductory research training in these short courses, often in Mandarin, but maintained research connections with these practitioners on their return home.

Phyllis' impact will continue to be felt for many years to come:

- in the careers she helped shape
- through the inspiration she provided to all who had the privilege of working with her and seeing her passion

Her warmth and hospitality was legendary. We will always remember her amazing Chinese New Year's morning teas in the old building. Even over the last year, whenever able, she kept working at her usual double-time pace. Her enthusiasm was infectious and we will miss her bright smile.

We will miss you.

Prof Lena Sancı and Prof Meredith Temple-Smith





Online Tributes

Messages and memories
posted on LinkedIn

Phyllis, bright jade, my good friend, my colleague will be sadly missed. Her dedication to build primary care research was second to none. Such a can-do, hard-working person full of warmth, generosity and kindness. Our condolences to Raymond and her lovely family.

Prof Doris Young

Professor of General Practice
The University of Melbourne

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Vale Phyllis - who brought her energy, positivity and passion to every endeavour. Phyllis supported so many to succeed -her generosity of spirit and commitment have touched so many over the years. Thoughts are with her family, friends and colleagues at this difficult time. Such a loss.

Prof Jane Gunn AO

Interim Provost
The University of Melbourne

So sorry to hear this sad news.
Sincere condolences to her family and friends.

Prof Kath Peters

Professor/Associate Dean International and Engagement
Western Sydney University

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My deepest sympathies to all of her family, friends and colleagues. She was a hard-working, honest and supportive academic, and such a pleasure to have occasionally worked along side of and learned from.

Prof Jane Tomnay AO

Director of the Centre of Excellence in Rural Sexual Health in Victoria

So sorry to hear this- really value her enthusiasm and drive to establish NAPRA - the NSW and ACT practice-based research alliance - and to collaborate to establish clinical trials network nationally - we will miss her. Thinking of her family and UWS colleagues.

Prof Rowena Ivers

Professor, University of Wollongong

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I also wish to send my condolences to her family and friends. I always enjoyed her company and astute discussions.

Dr Chris Hogan

Honorary Clinical A/Professor, The University of Melbourne

Such sad news, heartfelt condolences to her family.

Dr Talat Uppal

Director, Women's Health Road, Founder, Australia's first Abnormal Uterine Bleeding (AUB) Hub Clinical Senior Lecturer Macquarie University CEO Bleed Better Initiative Ambassador Heidi Health

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Vale Phyllis. I am so sad to hear this, my condolences to her family.

Sue Tan

Business Manager

A truly unique and passionate woman. Phyllis was my PhD Chair, always kind, always funny. This is very sad news. My condolences to her family, friends and colleagues.

Dr Grant Russell

Family physician and Health Services Researcher

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A truly unique and passionate woman. Phyllis was my PhD Chair, always kind, always funny. This is very sad news. My condolences to her family, friends and colleagues.

Dr Rebecca Bergin

Senior Research Fellow/ Vic Gov Early Career Research Fellow
Deakin University

A lovely tribute to a fine colleague. Condolences.

Prof Carl May

Professor of Health Systems Implementation,
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, University of London

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Vale Phyllis, a wonderful mentor, teacher and team member. I have great memories of her in the DGP back in the honours student days. Thoughts are with her beautiful family and friends.

Dr Giulia Depangher
General Dentist

Very sad to hear this. Talented, wise, caring colleague and friend to all. Sincere condolences to Phyllis's family.

Janelle Seymour
Capability Development, Knowledge Management and Evaluation and Research Specialist

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So sorry to hear this, Phyllis was such a wonderful woman.

Prof. Linda Worrall-Carter
Founder, Director and CEO at Her Heart
Women's Cardiovascular Disease Thought-Leader, Speaker

I am so sad to hear of Phyllis' passing. I worked with her when we co-supervised some research students. She was such a warm, generous and intelligent lady. I learnt so much from her and was very grateful to know her. I send my condolences to her family and to her colleagues at the Department of General Practice at The University of Melbourne.

Dr Jane Crowe
Specialist General Practitioner: Prostate Cancer
GP Cancer Survivorship

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I'm so sad to hear of Phyllis' passing yesterday, and I know she will be remembered fondly by all of the students who passed through the Department.

Dr Renee Fiolet
Research Fellow, Knowledge Translation

So sad to hear this - I remember Phyllis very fondly.

A/Prof Michael Wright
RACGP President, GP, Health Economist, Policy Researcher
Assoc Prof UNSW, Experienced Health Leader

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Phyllis was an incredible teacher and was so engaged with medical education. She will be remembered by so many. And many will continue using the skills and knowledge they learnt from her.

Planning Saw
Doctor of Medicine Student, Youth Advocate, Mental Health Researcher
Co-Founder of Global Health Youth Connect (GHYC)

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Incredibly sad to hear this news. I had the pleasure working with Phyllis over many years developing teaching resources related to qualitative research methods for the Doctor of Medicine and Master of Clinical Research. She was always a pleasure to engage with and willing to help out however she could. Deepest condolences to her family, friends and DGPPC colleagues.

Dr Justin Bilszta

Senior Lecturer, The University of Melbourne

She was a close colleague and friend for 20 years. I enjoyed working with her as she was someone I could completely rely on. We shared a lot of hard work but we also shared our hopes and our fears. I will miss her.

Prof Meredith Temple-Smith

Professor, The University of Melbourne

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Such an amazing legacy.

Patricia Davidson

Vice Chancellor's Distinguished Fellow, UNSW



I am shocked to hear the sad news. I miss her. My deepest condolences

Prof John Richards

Chair and Research Director

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What a loss of a wonderful human being and researcher. I loved working with her on the interprofessional education work. She was dedicated and selfless.

A/Prof Ruth McNair AM

Associate Professor, The University of Melbourne

Such sad news. She was my predecessor as President of the Australasian Association for Academic Primary Care (AAAPC) and her contribution to the association was immense.

Prof Tim Stokes

Elaine Gurr Professor of General Practice, University of Otago

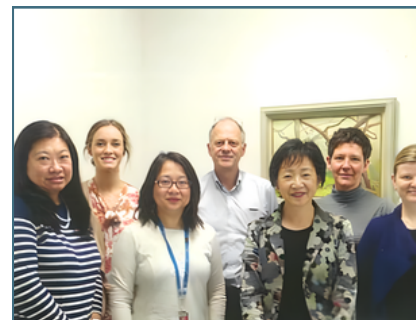
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What a tragedy. I am so sad to hear this news. My deepest condolences to her husband and family. Phyllis was a force of nature. She will be missed.

A/Professor Magdalena Simonis AM

Doctor, Women's Health Expert, Government Advisor, Board Director, Medical Educator, Writer, Researcher



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So sorry to hear of Phyllis's passing. Her impact leaves a legacy in primary care research. Thoughts to her family.

Prof Elizabeth Halcomb

Professor of Primary Health Care Nursing
University of Wollongong

Terribly sad news. I also remember Phyllis fondly from my time with Department of General Practice some time ago. Sending thoughts and respect to family friends and colleagues.

Dr Natasha Pavlin

Senior Medical Officer, Wurli Wurlinjang Aboriginal Health Service

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So sorry to hear this sad news. I have such fond memories of Phyllis. Such a good, hard-working person.

Prof Lisa Brophy

Professor in Social Work and Social Policy, La Trobe University

Such sad news, she will be dearly missed by so many. Her contribution to Australasian Association for Academic Primary Care (AAAPC) has been enormous over the years.

Prof Sarah Dennis

The University of Sydney, President AAAPC

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Thoughts with Phyllis's family at this time. I remember starting at DGP PC at the same time and admired her drive, purpose, seeing things in a different lens and collegiality. She will be missed.

A/Prof Justin Tse

Cancer Lead, The University of Melbourne



What a beautiful tribute to a wonderful human. Sorry to hear this news for Phyllis' family friends and wider colleagues.

Prof Victoria J Palmer

Co-Director, ALIVE National Centre for Mental Health Research Translation
The University of Melbourne

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Vale Phyllis, she did a lot for me when I first joined AAAPC and has done so much for primary care, she will be missed dearly.

Dr Flora Hui

Researcher, Optometrist, Board Director

I was very sad to learn about this. This is a huge loss to the Department and to primary care research. Phyllis was an exceptional person and will be sorely missed.

A/Prof Carolyn Ee

GP, A/Prof Cancer Survivorship and Primary Care
The University of Melbourne

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Just found out about this sad tragic premature loss of a dear colleague and friend.

Dr Teng Liaw

Clinician Scientist and Health Informatician

Phyllis Lau will be sorely missed. I was lucky enough to be in the same research team as Phyllis when I first started at The University of Melbourne. We had less interactions as she moved to NSW but whenever I saw her it was just so nice to catch up. Some of my fondest memories are travelling with her to Beijing and going shopping for handbags together after teaching; and having my first Singapore Sling at Raffles Hotel (and durian but let's not mention that!) while we were here for research meetings. She was fun, she was smart and she cared. My thoughts to her family, friends and close colleagues.

A/Prof Jo-Anne Manski-Nankervis

A/Professor Primary Care and Family Medicine
Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

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Very saddened to hear of her passing. Phyllis was generous, energetic and full of enthusiasm. She made a real impact on those around her and we were grateful for her contributions to our teaching in the Clinical Research programs. Thoughts are with her family, friends, and colleagues.

A/Prof Anita Horvath

Department of Medical Education, The University of Melbourne

Such terrible news!!! Such a wonderful colleague and friend.

Dr Malcolm Clark

GP, Camberwell Road Practice

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A truly unique and passionate woman. Phyllis was my PhD Chair, always kind, always funny. This is very sad news. My condolences to her family, friends and colleagues.

Dr Grant Russell

Family physician and Health Services Researcher

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Phyllis' death is such a loss. Thank you for reminding me of those legendary morning teas at Chinese New Year. As a grad student pregnant with my second son, Phyllis was so reassuring and hopeful as she shared some of her experiences juggling work and small people in their early years. It was clear how devoted Phyllis was to her family.

Dr Elizabeth McLindon

Research Fellow, The University of Melbourne

This is sad news indeed. Phyllis had an abundance of energy and passion for her work and was a lovely person in every regard. My condolences to her friends, family, University of Melbourne and Western Sydney colleagues.

Jason Micallef

Healthcare Business and Leadership Development Executive
The University of Melbourne

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In-Person Tributes

Wright Theatre
Level 4, Medical Building
The University of Melbourne
11 February 2026

Phyllis was a wonderful colleague and a force for good in our world. I always enjoyed her infectious enthusiasm, and her proactive and positive advocacy about ways to improve our nation's health services. She was an outstanding leader of the Australasian Association for Academic Primary Care, bringing researchers together to support improvements in the health care delivered to the people of Australia.

She was one of the lead researchers in our new national consortium for primary care research and was full of supportive ideas about how this should be designed. Her remarkable legacy continues through the many lives she impacted and the many health care improvements she influenced. We miss her and we mourn her passing.

Prof Michael Kidd AO
Chief Medical Officer for Australia

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Vale the wonderful, passionate, persistent, productive Phyllis! May her legacy endure.

Prof Jane Gunn AO
Interim Provost, The University of Melbourne



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There was simply no one else like Phyllis; her energy, care and support of students and the staff she worked with. She really was an unstoppable force, inspirational and deeply passionate about research, life and the people who were part of her work. She got things done and she will be forever remembered in the Department. Sending my deepest condolences to her wonderful family who she talked about all the time. Your sadness is unimaginable.

Kitty Novy

Research Assistant, Department of General Practice and Primary Care
The University of Melbourne

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The work of caring is often invisible; being new to the department, it was beautiful to see that Phyllis' care was so well known amongst her colleagues and made a pivotal difference to the wellbeing of those around her. Her work and care remains imbedded in the DGPPC team for years to come. Rest in Peace Phyllis

Early Career Academic

Department of General Practice and Primary Care

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Phyllis and I held our supervisions in Mandarin. She asked what my family called me at home. I said “Wenwen” and from then on, she called me Wenwen in every meeting and email, making me feel at home. It became our open secret.

She loved sharing her experiences in my city - Nanjing, and often told the story of training GPs in China. She always closed with: “Chinese people are smart and diligent. When they start to learn, they learn quickly and surpass others.” She was absolutely right. I never stopped sending her my notes and revisions, even as things changed. She read everything and replied when she could. She wanted to be treated as normal. That was the least I could do.

I deeply appreciate her effort in building understanding between China and Australia. She showed me what it means to be a cultural bridge, helped me rediscover my cultural confidence and encouraged me to find my voice - as a researcher and in my identity. That is one of her greatest contributions to who I am becoming.

Wen Liu

PhD Student, The University of Melbourne



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I only knew Phyllis from afar as when she joined the Department, I had left to oversee the MD program at two hospitals. It was pleasure on my return in 2024 to DGP PC to work again with her even though she moved to a role in Sydney.

Her impact was not only with DGP PC but she leaves a lasting legacy to research students and also the Melbourne MD program. As a fellow Chinese academic, there are struggles in addition to the normal stresses of academic life. She will be missed by many and many colleagues.

A/Prof Justin Chi-Sine Tse

Cancer Lead, Department of General Practice and Primary Care
The University of Melbourne

Sending my deepest condolences to Phyllis's family. I had the privilege of knowing Phyllis throughout all her years at the Department of General Practice at the University of Melbourne. I will always remember her steadfast focus and dedication to every task she undertook. Most importantly, she was generous with her time and guidance, especially in my early days as a junior research assistant. Her kindness and quiet strength made a lasting impact. Gone too soon.

Maria Stambas

Primary Care Clinical Trials Unit, Operations and Coordination
Department of General Practice and Primary Care

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Rest in Peace Phyllis, I will miss our annual meetings to review the travel grants, something I know you were passionate about. Thank you for the good humour and conversations

A/Prof Cath Kaylor-Hughes

Principal Research Fellow
Department of General Practice and Primary Care

Being unsure how to start writing this message, I was thinking about what Phyllis might say to me. I know she would reassure me and tell me that I should just get writing, to speak from the heart, and that no-one will judge what I write. It is hard though to put into words the impression Phyllis has left on me.

Phyllis oversaw my advisory panel during my PhD candidature and was very generous in her support and time for me. I remember one particularly disastrous day where the world seemed to be collapsing around me and I was pulled over in my car, crying on the phone to Phyllis that I just couldn't cope with all of the demands in my life and I was never going to submit my thesis.

Phyllis was at pains to remind me that nobody was going to suffer if I took the time I needed to focus on the things that matter, but that my family might if I didn't concentrate on them for a bit! It was good advice and I won't forget it. Sending my love.

Dr Renee Fiolet

Research Fellow
Deakin University

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The news of Phyllis's passing came as a shock. While I knew Phyllis for nearly 10 years, we didn't work closely until 2024. She brought humour, professionalism and knowledge to our shared student supervision meetings and made a lasting impression. My heartfelt thoughts are with her family left behind.

Dr Rachel Canaway

Research Fellow
Department of General Practice and Primary Care

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Professor Phyllis was a close friend and valued partner of Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine. She made significant contributions to the collaboration between our two universities, and her passing is a great loss to both our institution and Western Sydney University.

Dr Jianhua Zhang

Office of International Exchange and Cooperation
Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine

Phyllis was a wonderful PhD advisory panel chair and so supportive of me and other students. During COVID, her regular online catch up sessions were so important for us all, including her humorous personal stories about her family and coping in lock down. She is very missed here in the Department.

Dr Mandy McKenzie

Research Fellow, The University of Melbourne

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Phyllis was my advisory committee chair for my PhD. She was incredibly supportive and was loved by all the graduate research students. Her touch-base meetings became safe places to share and support one another. I send much love to her family at this difficult time and would like them to know that Phyllis will certainly be remembered for her warmth and kindness.

A/Prof Jennifer Neil

GP, Family Violence Educator, PhD candidate
The University of Melbourne

Phyllis was a superstar, shining brightly in everything that she did. My thoughts are with her family as they navigate this difficult time.

Dr Alison Flehr

Research Fellow
Department of General Practice and Primary Care

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Phyllis was a tour de force. She was visionary, enthusiastic, energetic and highly skilled in all she did. We were fortunate indeed that she chose Western Sydney in which to invest her huge energies over the final years of her life. I miss Phyllis enormously and can only imagine the sadness her family are feeling. Thinking of you all as you remember her extraordinary zest for life and try to come to terms with her physical absence from your lives. May the memories of Phyllis and her love for you all sustain you at this difficult time.

Jenny Reath

Previous Chair of General Practice at Western Sydney University

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I loved to co-teach with Phyllis as I always knew I could count on her completely, even to finish my sentence if I lost my train of thought! We all know that she lived life at twice the rate of everyone else....and in high heels!!

Prof Meredith Temple-Smith

Department of General Practice and Primary Care
The University of Melbourne

Phyllis contributed so much to the Department over the years. She was one of the first people I met when I joined in 2010 and was so friendly and welcoming. She worked tirelessly in the graduate research space and contributed to much-needed research in Indigenous health and culturally sensitive care. My sincere condolences to her family and friends at this time.

Dr Christine Hallinan

Department of General Practice and Primary Care
The University of Melbourne

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Phyllis was one of the most welcoming people I met when I first started as a junior GP trainee colleague in the Department. Over the years she remained so welcoming, friendly and helpful to me anytime we met. She always took a genuine interest in one's personal life, asking about exams, work and family and her office door was always open!

More recently, I had the privilege of her being involved in teaching, developing and contributing a clinical case with a focus on cultural aspects of clinical care in our award winning selective subject that the Department has offered to 2nd year medical students since 2023. We spent much of that first planning meeting, talking about the joys of family and motherhood!

It was heartfelt to hear she got precious time with her beautiful grandson August. May all the many memories of her give some solace to you all at this difficult time.

Dr Roisin Bhamjee

Lecturer, Department of General Practice and Primary Care
The University of Melbourne

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The first time I was in Melbourne, I met with Phyllis, who had seen me only once before, she was so warm and kind to me. She understood that, as a foreign student I was apprehensive to speak up or “ruffle any feathers”. She knew exactly where I was coming from. I will never forget what she told me... she said “you don’t have to be afraid to speak up at Melbourne Uni. We are here to listen and help and we are not birds!” She said it with such confidence and understanding about the background of how things are generally done in Asian countries (ie you don’t ruffle feathers). Her humour immediately put me at ease.

Later, when I was pregnant and going on maternity leave in the middle of my PhD (full of self-doubt) she told me about how she had prepared for her own exams with one baby in arms and one nibbling her toes, and that family always comes first! I never got a chance to tell her how many times I pictured that scene in my head during some very challenging postpartum days. It helped me get up and keep going, knowing that everyone’s journey is different.

I only knew her briefly and met her only a few times, even so, she had a profound effect on me in ways that she probably didn’t know. I wanted her family to know how grateful I am for the kindness, time and energy she gave me. My heartfelt condolences to all her loved ones.

Tina George

PhD Student

The University of Melbourne

Thank you for all the love, supervision, warmth and everything Phyllis... Will always remember you...
Rest in love..

A/Prof Fitriana Ekawati

Lecturer, Universitas Gadjah Mada

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I was among many fortunate beneficiaries of Phyllis's enthusiasm and commitment in fostering graduate research when she recruited me to the PHCRED Fellowship. At the time my ambition was to complete the one year fellowship before retiring from the workforce; just to explore a challenging question that arose from my work at General Practice Victoria. 17 years later I am still here, hooked on the scholarly life.....and the research question remains as challenging today.

I fondly remember the day Phyllis gave me the paperwork to enrol in the Master of Primary Health Care at her own initiative, along with a large vote of confidence that I could succeed. She really was instrumental in my decision as I am sure she was for other students she encouraged. I think of her as a 'tiger mother' not just to her own children but to early researchers she nurtured like me.

Phyllis is certainly a significant loss to the primary care research community.

Dr Susan M. Webster

Honorary Senior Research Fellow
The University of Melbourne



After I didn't get into medicine, completing my Honours research with you in 2014 became a turning point in my life. What began as a research year became so much more. You encouraged me to look beyond medicine and consider law, seeing in me a fire and passion I had not yet recognised in myself. Where I saw disappointment, you saw potential.

You stood up for me during my thesis, pushed me to publish my work and reminded me that my voice mattered. Even years after your formal supervision ended, you continued to support me through setbacks, always urging me to keep going. Gifting me your mother's crocheted jumper, which she had made for you, was a kindness I will never forget. I will always cherish it as a symbol of your generosity and belief in me. Phyllis, your mentorship changed my life and I will keep striving to make you proud.

Sahema Saberi

Lawyer, Victoria Legal Aid

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Phyllis was my PhD committee chair and I also worked closely with her in the AAAPC. I was very lucky to have experienced Phyllis's absolute zest and passion for primary care research. I learnt a lot by how she nurtured the next generation of researchers in her role in the research training team at the Department of General Practice. She was always firm but kind and always, always had the wellbeing of the student or the person she was working with guiding her actions. She never shied away from hard work and there are many people whose professional careers would not be what they are without Phyllis. I am so sorry for your loss and I hope that you can see what an impact Phyllis had in her very successful professional career.

Dr Sibel Saya

Senior Research Fellow
The University of Melbourne



I had worked with Phyllis in 2015 on some rapid reviews but was privileged to get to know her much better when I started in a support role on the Cultural Respect Encompassing Simulation Training (CREST) program. We found common ground in each being a mother to three sons and a daughter of a parent with dementia and I appreciated her dry sense of humour and sharp wit.

CREST began as a funded research project that Phyllis was leading with colleagues at other universities, aiming to address health inequality. The rationale was that providing cultural sensitivity training to health professionals, tailored to a health consultation setting, would improve their understanding of a patient's cultural influences relating to health and how these need to be considered to achieve optimal health outcomes. People of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds were recruited as key informants in training workshops for health professional students and practitioners. Phyllis worked in collaboration with these CALD casual staff members to co-design simulated patient case scenarios reflective of their cultural experiences. e.g. Conflicts between management of diabetes or asthma and traditional beliefs; an international student with little understanding of the Australian health care system; a mother with low English proficiency in need of parental support; working with an interpreter; a refugee with mental health concerns; and a person with a sexual identity that conflicted with their religious upbringing. A scenario developed later in the project involved consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stolen generation survivors; this was the beginning of a lasting partnership Phyllis developed with Indigenous Elders. The effect of the training program on cultural competency (awareness, knowledge, skills, encounters and desire) was evaluated before and after the workshops and the program was shown to improve 4 out of 5 cultural competency domains, being particularly effective in enhancing cultural skills.

After funding ran out in 2016, Phyllis and Karen Livesay tried to shift the training to a user pays model to continue the positive impact on health professionals and students. Over the following three years, training was provided to thousands of students in The University of Melbourne medical degree, nursing and paramedicine courses at LaTrobe University, as well as health professionals, such as staff from the Epilepsy Foundation. Results showed that the training was effective in improving cultural competency. Unfortunately, providing training under a consultation model to poorly resourced institutions wasn't financially sustainable and the program petered out.

Phyllis was an inspirational person to work with. She was a committed advocate for the CALD simulated patients that she had recruited and I learnt a lot about how culture influences interactions not just within the health care system but more broadly. In more recent years I worked less with her. She continued to provide the cultural competency tutorial as part of our Departmental student research training program and through this committee I was aware of the extent of her support and advocacy for graduate research students. Her passion for sharing cultural knowledge as a means of gaining a greater understanding of others was also shown through the amazing Chinese New Year celebratory morning teas she organised. Everyone with Asian cultural heritage could be expected to be co-opted into helping and was encouraged to share their story.

Phyllis was always very organised and had a way of quietly achieving things through persistence and determination. Underneath it all was her desire to make the world a better place, particularly for those less fortunate or facing adversity of some kind. She was an inspiring woman who leaves a big gap in the lives of all who worked with her.

Ann-Maree Duncan

Children and Young People's Health Research Group
The University of Melbourne



When she organised the Lunar New Year morning teas, Phyllis would walk around the Department tracking down anyone who might celebrate. The first year she asked me, I told her that as an intercountry adoptee I had never celebrated Lunar New Year. She laughed, waved her hand mock-dismissively and said, “That’s ok, you can still come and be an honorary.” From then on, she included me every year, giving me a sense of cultural belonging where there had once been very little. Though she laughed it off at the time, I could tell she knew what that small act of inclusion might come to mean for me. It is a gift I will always carry.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, that same instinct kicked in again. Phyllis took the graduate students under her wing, checking in on us, drawing us together and making sure no one disappeared into isolation. In the middle of an anxious, disconnected time, we got to know her a little more. Her care gave us connection when it mattered most and it did more for our mental health than she probably ever realised.

Dr Amy Coe

Research Fellow

Department of General Practice and Primary Care



Phyllis was a great mentor who worked tirelessly to support graduate research students. She established the Department’s first ever alumni organisation ‘GR-Connect’ and set up an internship/immersion program for existing graduate research students. This gave us a visible postdoctoral pathway as primary care researchers following our PhDs, which is instrumental. I worked with her fortnightly in 2024 to set this program up within our Department. I’ll never forget her ‘tiger mum’ advice and motivation. Phyllis always pushed me to do my best: in research, in medicine and to have pride in your work. I will never forget her list of food that I must try on my first ever international conference trip to Singapore. She warned that she would never forgive me if I didn’t try the chilli crab or chicken rice.

Her work to bridge cultural gaps both in graduate research teaching and in medical education will continue to inspire me throughout my entire career. My condolences to her family, friends and anyone lucky enough to have known her closely.

Chiara Beccia

MD/PhD Student, Department of General Practice and Primary Care





Phyllis was a tireless advocate for improving equity and access to healthcare for minority populations, including communication with cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) patients. She knew that medical students practised their skills through roleplaying with simulated patients but the sim patients tended not to be culturally diverse like the majority of patients in the outer metro hospitals of Melbourne. Phyllis saw there were significant health inequalities for migrant populations with poorer access to health services and poorer health outcomes than the Australian-born population.

Enter the Cultural Respect Encompassing Simulation Training Program. This program trained CALD simulated patients (mostly refugees) to share their experience and perspectives with students and health professionals. In 2013, Phyllis and her colleagues delivered CREST training to 1709 health professions students in urban settings. She wanted the CREST training embedded as a sustainable component of the Melbourne MD but the cost to deliver the program to both urban and rural schools was a barrier. Nevertheless, Phyllis continued to lobby the Head of the MD. This included Phyllis personally driving the sim patients to Echuca, Shepparton, Wangaratta and Ballarat.

We had a lot of fun getting to know each other during this project, driving up and down the Hume Hwy. The findings showed that training delivered via live video-streaming and simulation achieved similar results in rural settings to the in-person urban training. Phyllis was ahead of her time with online delivery. And while simulated patients still have a fairly homogeneous cultural profile, Phyllis showed what is possible when training medical students in culturally competent care.

Prof Robyn Woodward-Kron

Professor of Healthcare Communication
Department of Medical Education, The University of Melbourne

Phyllis and I shared many interests – in fact during covid when I tried to keep staff spirits up by suggesting we post dancing videos of ourselves – Phyllis was the first to take up the challenge and post a video of herself, doing a salsa I think. Actually for a few years she took classes, like me, at Dance Dynamics.

I miss Phyllis SO much. I always used to say to staff here, that if I got run over by a bus, the person who can tell you how to manage any issue in relation to research training would be Phyllis. I am so sad that can't happen, but I am so grateful to have had her in my life, and to have shared not only aspects of our work, but also aspects of lives, as we each raised our three children to adulthood.

Prof Meredith Temple-Smith

Director of Research and Training
Department of General Practice and Primary Care



Memories are the legacy of love

Unknown

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We will always remember you

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