VERA PAGE LAST AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN CLINICAL LEADERSHIP

Prize: $500

Background:

Vera Page Last was a trailblazer in the field of radiotherapy physics, known for her fearless innovation, scientific rigour, and unwavering dedication to improving patient care. Her legacy spans decades and continents, shaping the evolution of medical physics in the UK, USA, and Australia. Vera began her career in post-war London at St Thomas's Hospital, entering the field at a time when formal training was virtually non-existent. Thrown into the deep end, she quickly found her calling in the emerging field of radiotherapy, mastering early technologies such as cobalt units and radium-based brachytherapy, and navigating treatment planning with only slide rules and lead wires.

Driven by a deep sense of responsibility and intellectual curiosity, Vera constantly questioned established methods and sought out new, better solutions. Her independent survey of brachytherapy practices in the UK revealed widespread inconsistencies, sparking her desire to expand her expertise. This led her to the United States, where she made significant contributions at Yale and Stanford. There, she helped develop and standardise radiotherapy physics departments, championing safety protocols, formalised calculations, and rigorous testing—years ahead of global norms. Vera's work emphasised that physicists must not only possess theoretical knowledge but also clinical insight, and that any new treatment should be validated through robust methods before clinical application.

Vera was unafraid to challenge powerful manufacturers, prevailing assumptions, or entrenched practices if patient safety was at stake. Her findings and advocacy resulted in international improvements to safety standards and clinical protocols. Her return to Australia marked a new phase, where she applied her wealth of global experience to develop and strengthen radiotherapy services at key hospitals such as Prince of Wales, Royal North Shore, and Sydney Adventist. Whether she was pioneering linear accelerator use, refining brachytherapy verification, or balancing professional excellence with the demands of family life, she brought an unmatched combination of diligence, compassion, and integrity to her work.

In recognition of her profound contributions to clinical medical physics and her impact on improving patient outcomes, the Australasian College of Physical Scientists and Engineers in Medicine (ACPSEM) established the Vera Page Last Award. This award honours individuals who, like Vera, combine scientific excellence with courage, empathy, and an unwavering commitment to clinical care.

The ACPSEM, as the sole member of the Better Healthcare Technology Foundation, acknowledges that much of the most valuable clinical development work undertaken by medical physicists often goes unrecognised. This work—essential to introducing safer and more effective healthcare technologies—can be especially challenging due to limited resources, heavy clinical workloads, research constraints, rural isolation, or personal responsibilities such as caregiving. Systemic barriers, including the effects of past discrimination, also make such contributions even more remarkable.

The Vera Last Clinical Leadership Award is awarded by nomination to individuals responsible for a specific activity that has improved patient care, even within the bounds of economic, logistical, and social constraints. It seeks to give deserved recognition to the kind of quiet, behind-the-scenes work that Vera exemplified—work that demands ingenuity, persistence, and compassion, and that ultimately improves lives. Her story continues to inspire a new generation of clinical physicists to lead with integrity, curiosity, and care.

Administration of the Award:

- The award will be made annually, provided financial support is available.
- The award constitutes a certificate and cash amount, reviewed annually.
- Nominations can be made by anyone, and self-nomination is allowed.
- The awardee(s) will be listed on the ACPSEM and BHT websites, and notifications of the award may be placed in affiliated newsletters and other digital media.
- Nominations will be assessed by an award committee formed by the BHT Board and which can include co-opted non-board representatives.
- The award may be made for more than one nomination in any year, or need not be awarded at all, at the discretion of the assessment panel.

Eligibility:

- Both individuals and teams may be nominated, provided all nominees meet all other eligibility criteria.
- Medical physicists working in a primarily clinical role in Australia and/or New Zealand. This can include those in unpaid employment, those working in hospitals (public and private), and those working for consulting organisations.
- Nominees must be members of the ACPSEM (at any grade).
- Nominees must sign a declaration that the application accurately reflects the activity and their contribution to the activity.
- Nominations will not be accepted for individuals employed in leadership positions (e.g., Chief/Deputy Chief/Director/ Deputy Director managing teams of >2 people), as interpreted at the discretion of the judges. Overall (i.e. accumulated) experience however is not an impediment to nomination.
- The activity for which the nomination is being made should have been implemented in the previous 24 months of the due date for applications.
- The activity should have been predominantly undertaken within Australia or New Zealand.
- The activity for which the nomination is being made must focus on patient care and patient benefit and operate at the clinic level. Examples include:
- Improvements in quality and safety
- The introduction of new technology
- Production of an information source (e.g. leaflet, web article or resource)
- Contribution to the education of medical physicists for patient benefit, or to the communication of the role of medical physicists in the clinic to the public
- The activity may be multi-disciplinary in nature, though the nominee must have played a significant role.
- For self-nominations, contact details for two referees are required.

Nomination Criteria:

1. Level of patient benefit: The assessment panel will favour activities that provide the greatest benefit to the greatest number. “Benefit” may be interpreted as increases in patient safety, increases in patient awareness regarding medical physics and associated medical procedures, improvement in the experience of patients with the healthcare system, potential improvements in patient outcomes (treatment efficacy, diagnostic accuracy, reduction in side-effects), increased cost-effectiveness.
2. Innovation: The assessment panel will favour activities that demonstrate novel thinking and innovation, resourcefulness, collaboration and cooperation.
3. Applicability: Assessors will favour activities that can be translated to achieve similar patient benefit in other clinics or in other clinical settings.
4. Relative to opportunity: The assessors will consider the achievement relative to the opportunities and circumstances of the nominees. These factors can include, though are not limited to:
    - Membership of cultural, age, sex or gender-identity groups that are poorly represented or for whom historical discrimination is acknowledged.
    - Limited access for the nominees to resources including finances, academic and/or research support.
    - The proportion of workload normally consumed by routine clinical activities.
    - Employment in remote or rural locations.
    - Disability.
    - Debilitating illness.
    - Carer responsibilities including disruptions due to pregnancy and parental leave.

ACPSEM
Australasian College of Physical Scientists & Engineers in Medicine

BETTER Healthcare Technology FOUNDATION

NOMINATION STATEMENT

Title:

Full Name:

Preferred Pro-nouns:

Academic Qualifications:

Current Position:

I declare that all information provided in the nomination for this award is true and accurate as at the time of writing and to the best of my knowledge.

Signed:

Dated:

This signed statement must be provided with your nomination submission.