

Emeritus Professor John Robin Warren AC

The honorary degree of Doctor of Medicine was conferred upon Emeritus Professor John Robin Warren AC by the Chancellor Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO at a special ceremony held in the Great Hall at 5.30pm on Saturday 10 November 2012.

Honorary degrees were also conferred upon Cate Blanchett, Kate Grenville, Professor Martin Rees, Lord Rees of Ludlow and Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu at the same ceremony.

Citation

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to commend Robin Warren to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Medicine (honoris causa). He has distinguished himself through his outstanding contributions to the promotion of science and medicine in Australia and overseas.

Together with Barry Marshall, he won the 2005 Nobel Prize in Medicine or Physiology for their work on the bacterial basis for stomach ulcers, which revolutionised the treatment of gastro-duodenal ulcers. Their research enabled the development of an antibiotic cure, which has also led to a significant reduction in the prevalence of gastric cancer.

The Adelaide-born Robin Warren entered medical school at the University of Adelaide, graduating with an MBBS in 1961. Having originally targeted a career in psychiatry after his junior resident year, he instead turned to pathology and, after training at the Royal Melbourne Hospital in 1967 he was admitted to the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia.

In 1968, he moved to Perth to take up a position as staff specialist in pathology at Royal Perth Hospital, where he stayed for 30 years. It was in 1979, in the course of his work, that he first observed bacteria in stomach sections associated with peptic ulcers.

Initially, he found it hard to interest other doctors in his unorthodox line of research. However, in 1981 Barry Marshall started working at the hospital as the new gastroenterology registrar and was directed to talk to Robin Warren about his research. As Dr Warren recalls: "He was the first person who actually was interested in what I was doing."

The next year the two researchers began their first study to determine the relationship between the bacteria Robin Warren had observed, now called *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*), and Peptic Ulcer Disease. In 1983 they sent a letter to *The Lancet* journal in England, describing the results of their work. When *The Lancet* published their letter a few months later, other researchers around the world began researching and isolating the bacteria.

Their revolutionary discovery was at first rejected by the medical fraternity. In 1984 *The New York Times* published an article by its medical correspondent on the possible link between the bacteria and peptic ulcers. Reflecting on the breakthrough many years later, the journalist said he had never seen the medical community more defensive or more critical of a story in all the years he had been at the newspaper.

Over the next decade their findings were increasingly accepted and eventually they were able to demonstrate that *Helicobacter pylori* was the causative agent in peptic ulcers, rather than stress, spicy foods and acid, as had previously been thought.

The culmination of this recognition came in 2005 when Robin Warren and Barry Marshall were jointly awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. In 2007 Robin Warren was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia. He is now Emeritus Professor at the University of Western Australia and Royal Perth Hospital.

Chancellor, I present Robin Warren for admission to the degree of Doctor of Medicine (honoris causa), and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.