

Dr Basil Hetzel

Faculty of Health Sciences

17 September 2017, 2.00pm

Chancellor, I present to you the Honourable Dr Basil Hetzel.

Basil Hetzel was born in London but moved to Adelaide as a child. He graduated in Medicine from the University of Adelaide with Distinction in 1944, subsequently undertook his postgraduate education and early research in Adelaide, moving to New York as a Fulbright Research Scholar in 1951. This was followed by a Research Fellowship position in London. He returned to Adelaide as a Reader and later Michell Professor of Medicine from 1956 – 1968. He subsequently became the Foundation Professor of Social and Preventative Medicine at Monash University and thereafter the first Chief of CSIRO Division of Human Nutrition. He established, and subsequently became Executive Director of, the International Council for Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders, an International non-government organisation working closely with the WHO and UNICEF.

Throughout his career Dr Hetzel has had a broad perspective on health and disease placing a strong emphasis on an integrated ecological view including psycho social aspects. This was developed through practice, teaching and research in clinical medicine during his time as Head of the University Department of Medicine at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and subsequently in Public Health at both Monash University and CSIRO. He developed a particular interest in thyroid disease as a Fulbright Fellow at the Cornell New York Hospital Medical Centre and as an international Fellow at Royal College of Physicians in London. His initial studies concentrated on hyperthyroidism which his group showed was an autoimmune condition with a stress related component. In 1964 however, he began to focus on the effects of iodine deficiency on the thyroid gland. He studied this in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and China. At that time it had been established that iodine deficiency could lead to goitre and in infancy and childhood was associated with retarded growth and development, particularly brain development. His group developed an intervention strategy using iodised oil injections for the correction of severe iodine deficiency and was the first to show that disorders of brain development in the setting of iodine deficiency could be prevented by this approach. This intervention has now been applied on a massive scale in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In parallel with his clinical and public health studies in iodine deficiency, he led a multidisciplinary team of physiologists that documented the effects of iodine deficiency on brain development in animal models.

At Monash University he developed research leading to action on a variety of urban and health problems including suicide, traffic crashes and the health of Aborigines and Greek migrants. He has an extensive list of over 200 scientific publications and has authored or edited 19 books including "Health and Australian Society" which has sold more than 40,000 copies. He was author of "The Story of Iodine Deficiency – A Challenge in International Nutrition" which has been translated into French, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese and Russian.

He subsequently became Lieutenant Governor of South Australia. In 2001, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital established The Basil Hetzel Institute for Medical Research in his honour, and he has received numerous other prestigious awards including the Distinguished Research Achievement of the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disability, the Prince Mahidol Award presented by the King of Thailand and the Pollin Prize for Research on Iodine Deficiency as a cause of brain damage in children. He has served on many influential government and community bodies, previously being a member of the Central Board of Health and the SA Health Commission.

His outstanding achievements in major aspects of public health and clinical medicine have had a substantial impact on the lives of many individuals. He has served the University of Adelaide, his State and his profession with distinction, and received the Distinguished Alumni Award of the University of Adelaide in 1995.

Chancellor, in recognition of his exceptionally distinguished service to medical research in South Australia and more broadly to society, I present to you the Honourable Dr Basil Hetzel, Companion of the Order of Australia, Knight of Justice of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, Fellow, Royal College of Physicians, Fellow, Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Fellow, Faculty of Public Health Medicine (Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom), Honorary Fellow of the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine, Fellow of the Academy of Technological Sciences & Engineering, Honorary Doctor of Science (James Cook University) Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of the University (University of South Australia), for admission to the honorary degree of Doctor of the University (honoris causa).