

Adrian Lee AC FRSN FASM (1941–2023)

Robert Marks, Editor¹



Adrian Lee AC FRSN BSc PhD FASM was an academic at the University of New South Wales for thirty-eight years, first as a lecturer teaching medical and science students, to Professor of Medical Microbiology and Head of the School of Microbiology and Immunology for nine years.

His progression through the academic ranks was a reflection not only of his outstanding commitment to learning and teaching, but also his stellar research in the field of gut microbiology. During his career, Adrian built a large research team working in different aspects of this broad field,

most notably the gut bacterium, *Helicobacter pylori*.²

Adrian started his research with René Dubos, the so-called father of the gut microbiome, at Rochester University in 1967. His early research was focussed on curved and spiral-shaped members of the “normal microflora,” now referred to as the “microbiota.” This was a poorly understood area of microbiology, but, forty years later, has become a particularly hot area of the discipline and importance in all aspects of physical and mental well-being. Adrian’s work on the largely uncharacterised gut bacteria drew the interest of future Nobel Laureate, Barry Marshall, who sought Adrian’s guidance regarding curved bacilli that he and Robin Warren had observed in gastric biopsies of patients with gastritis and peptic ulcers. Adrian’s contribution to the research was to culture and grow the *Helicobacter pylori* organisms for Marshall and Warren — this was no mean feat. Many years later, Barry Marshall invited Adrian to the Nobel award ceremony in Sweden in 2005 and included him as an author in his book, *Helicobacter Pioneers: First-hand Accounts from the Scientists who Discovered Helicobacters 1892–1982*. (Wiley-Blackwell).

Adrian’s persistence and success in the challenging area of gut microbiology was recognised by the awarding of nationally competitive research grants from the

¹ The Editor acknowledges the obituary of Mitchell et al. (2023) for its information about Adrian Lee’s career.

² See his paper: Adrian Lee. Adventures with spiral bugs and *Helicobacter*. *Journal & Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* 154: 34–43. <https://royalsoc.org.au/images/pdf/journal/154-1-Lee.pdf>

National Health and Medical Research Council for over 30 years (1972–2003) — a truly remarkable record. He published over 250 research articles and had a significant impact on the *H. pylori* field. His major contributions include an understanding of how gastric acid contributes to pathology, the development of small-animal models to study *H. pylori* disease, and pioneering preclinical studies proving the feasibility of *H. pylori* vaccines.

In addition to being an exceptional researcher, Adrian was also an outstanding educator, inspiring and teaching thousands of future doctors and microbiologists. This was recognised by numerous awards, including the Vice-Chancellor's Award for Teaching Excellence at the University of New South Wales and the inaugural Distinguished Teaching Award of the Australian Society for Microbiology. During this time, he acted as a consultant for the World Health Organization in Medical Education, running workshops around the world in learning and teaching for health professionals. He extended this passion for education to support his colleagues to develop their teaching practice in his role as Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Quality Improvement) at UNSW. In 2008, he was awarded a Career Achievement Award

by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council for outstanding contribution to learning and teaching recognised across the higher education sector.

In his retirement, as a Professor Emeritus, he was Chair of the Academic Board of the Think Education Group and Torrens University and undertook various consultancies in Higher Education, all related to strategies to improve the student learning experience. He was an active Fellow of the Royal Society of NSW, president of the Lane Cove community choir, La Voce, and active in the Botany Bay Bourbon & Beefsteak Club. Adrian was an inspirational and passionate leader in microbiology research and education who left an indelible influence on those who had the privilege to work with him. He is survived by his wife Nerissa, children Andrew and Amanda, and the wider family.

Reference

Mitchell H, O'Rourke J, Lutze-Mann L, Ferrero R and Hazell S (2023) Obituary: Emeritus Professor Adrian Lee AC BSc PhD FASM (1941–2023), *Microbiology Australia* 44(3), 172. <https://doi.org/10.1071/MA23047>. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND). <https://www.publish.csiro.au/MA/pdf/MA23047>.

