



Revered practitioner honoured at Catholic Health Australia conference

A renowned gynaecologist/obstetrician who has worked at Melbourne's Mercy Hospital for Women for almost 40 years has been awarded the Sister Maria Cunningham Lifetime Contribution Award for his significant contribution to Catholic healthcare.

Associate Professor Dr Michael Rasmussen was handed the honour in front of 300 delegates at Catholic Health Australia's annual conference, held this year in Perth from 28-30 August.

Dr Rasmussen began work as a clinician at what's now known as Mercy Hospital for Women in 1985. His current post is Mercy Health's Clinical Director of Women's and Children's Programs.

Dr Rasmussen - known as "Razz" to his friends colleagues - said he was honoured and humbled to receive CHA's most prestigious award.

"The award speaks in no small part to the support of my family and colleagues. My thanks extend to all those I've worked with since arriving at what was then the Mercy Maternity Hospital, back in 1985," he said.

Dr Rasmussen said the achievement allowed him to reflect on so many highlights across his years working at the Mercy and the evolution in gynaecology, prenatal diagnosis, perinatal medicine and in community expectation.

"This award highlights the role clinical leaders play in providing healthcare to the women and families we serve, and acknowledges the challenges we face," he said.

Staff and colleagues have lauded Dr Rasmussen for his leadership skills, his intelligence, kindness and compassion.

His colleagues described him as an "institution" who has always strongly advocated for women both as patients and trainees at a college level.

Dr Rasmussen said when he meets with a new batch of young residents and registrars on their first day, he always performs two tasks.

"I put my phone number on a white board and tell them that I am always available.

"I also stress Mercy's responsibility to the community within the totality of Victoria's health system but as well I point out the heritage and ethos of Mercy Health's services."



Jenny Parker, Deputy Chair of CHA Board, said: "We were honoured to present the annual Sr Maria Cunningham Lifetime Contribution Award, which is bestowed annually on a Catholic health leader.

"This is the most significant award of the evening and a special award in our ministry".

Mercy Health Group Chief Executive Officer Angela Nolan, who assisted with the presentation of the award, said Dr Rasmussen had inspired and supported many other practitioners within his field.

"Michael has influenced the next generation in a myriad of ways. He has led through example in terms of providing best care and advocating for women and trainees at a college level and within the community," she said.

Each year, Catholic Health Australia recognises the achievements of individuals and organisations that have worked towards improving the development and delivery of services within a Catholic service delivery framework.

The CHA Awards recognise Member organisations, both large and small, as well as individuals and collaborations doing outstanding work.

This year CHA had six categories, including a new Good Samaritan Mission Award.

The Winners

Outreach Health Care: St John of God Horizon House

Leadership in Positive Ageing: Meredith Hall, Southern Cross Care Queensland

Excellence in Pastoral Care: Ian Simms, Southern Cross Care WA

Nurse of the Year: John McAllister from St Vincent's Hospital Sydney

Emerging Leader: Tiffany Clayton from Mater at Home

The Good Samaritan Mission Award: *I Am Living* program, Calvary Health Care Board in partnership with Catholic Cemeteries and Crematoria and Mercy Health

History of the Sister Maria Cunningham Lifetime Contribution Award

Sister Maria Cunningham was a nurse and a leader of Catholic health care ministries for all her working life. She was instrumental in the establishment of Catholic Health Australia. She set an example for others by committing her life to service of the sick and the poor through working in hospitals, prisons and with mothers and children. In recognition of her life of service, Catholic Health Australia awarded her the inaugural Sr Maria Cunningham Lifetime Contribution Award in 2011, and determined an annual award would be given in her name in subsequent years.



Criteria for the Sister Maria Cunningham Lifetime Contribution Award

The Sr Maria Cunningham Lifetime Contribution Award has been bestowed by the Catholic Health Australia Board on Catholic health Leaders since 2011. The award is given to those who have made significant contributions to the Church's presence in health and aged care, and inspired others working in Catholic health and aged care ministries. The award recipients have enabled the healing love of Jesus to be felt by people in need.