



A passion for patient outcomes

At the recent ASC in Adelaide Associate Professor Leo Pinczewski was presented with one of the College's most prestigious awards

The College's most prestigious accolade – the Award for Excellence in Surgery – has been bestowed upon Associate Professor Leo Pinczewski, a Sydney-based orthopaedic surgeon and recognised world leader in knee reconstruction surgery.

The award, presented upon only nine occasions in the past two decades and the first to an orthopaedic surgeon, is given to surgeons or surgical units who have demonstrated the highest level of surgical achievement by world standards and who have provided a prolonged and sustained contribution to the art and science of surgery.

Previous recipients include Professor Graeme Clark for the development of the Cochlear Implant and Sydney neurosurgeon Professor Chris O'Brien.

Associate Professor Pinczewski commenced orthopaedic practice in Sydney in 1984, becoming a Visiting Medical Officer at the Mater Private Hospital where he has built a reputation for excellence. He is recognised internationally for his research and development in the field of knee surgery, with the highest level of surgical achievement in the area of anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) reconstruction.

In 2009, he performed his 10,000th ACL reconstruction, a significant milestone in surgical experience by international standards.

His research, which has resulted in more than 40 articles published in international journals of Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine, has enabled the refinement of surgical techniques, while his innovations have resulted in new

procedures and equipment to enable the advancement of knee surgery.

According to the Citation provided by College Fellow Dr Justin Roe and delivered at this year's Annual Scientific Congress in Adelaide, Associate Professor Pinczewski has been awarded the Evelyn Hamilton Trust Memorial Prize for best scientific paper at the Australian Orthopaedic Association Scientific Meeting on three occasions and the inaugural AOA research award. He continues to present extensively at international forums and publish his research in peer reviewed journals.

"As Co-founder of the North Sydney Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Centre, Leo Pinczewski has provided leadership in the field of Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine, supervising and instructing over 75 international



Daughter Rachel, Leo and his wife Liz.

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Orthopaedic Fellows, Australian Fellows, registrars and PhD students.” the Citation reads.

“He currently holds a clinical associate professorship with the University of Notre Dame, Australia, and teaches postgraduate medical students. Currently he holds esteemed memberships nationally and internationally in various Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine associations.

“His commitment to his patients is shown through the considerable time that he commits to their care (and) the high quality of his work is reflected in the numbers of patients that seek his advice and expertise on a weekly basis. He will continue to influence the development of surgical techniques with his experience and research into the future and these characteristics and his exceptional surgical expertise have made him well suited to receive the award of Excellence in Surgery.”

Speaking to Surgical News after receiving the award, Associate Professor Pinczewski described it as the highlight of his career and completely unexpected.

“The first I heard about this was when I was working at a country clinic and I was asked to call the College,” he said.

“The hairs on the back of my neck stood up and I wondered what had gone wrong so to hear of the award was a nice surprise.”

Associate Professor Pinczewski said the award meant a great deal to him given the

absence of a public hospital or university appointment. Instead, he said, he worked to make the Mater Private Hospital a centre of excellence in the field of orthopaedic surgery.

“Initially we established training posts for medical students, then orthopaedic surgical training and were one of the first hospitals to do that in the private sector,” he said.

“Then we developed a world renowned post-Fellowship training program to teach international surgeons.

“This award is significant to me because it reflects peer recognition for the work that my team performs, in particular for our commitment to quality patient care.”

Associate Professor Pinczewski did his own training at the Royal North Shore, Mater, Concord Repatriation and Royal Prince Alfred Hospitals and in 1982 he undertook overseas training in rheumatoid surgery in Edinburgh.

Initially trained as a hip surgeon and unable to secure a place in such a specialist unit, he took the opportunity to work with knee specialist Dr Mervin Cross.

He said that receiving the American British and Canadian (ABC) Travelling Fellowship in 1992 had been a watershed in his career.

“This was a six-week travelling Fellowship which allowed me to visit all the top units and meet the people who wrote the text books,” he said.

“It was an eye-opening experience in a

way to find they were very normal people, very caring and very dedicated, but that along with that they were totally committed to research.

“When I returned, I began my research work, initially simply in order to understand the surgical outcomes for my patients. The introduction of computers at that time made this possible in that you didn't need the resources of a university to compile useful data and it meant that we were in a position to question how outcomes could be improved.

“Out of those questions, came the development of a new operation of soft-tissue grafts for knee reconstructions, such as using the hamstring tendons and conducting the procedure with an arthroscope when most other units were still doing open surgery.”

Associate Professor Pinczewski said the challenges still ahead continued to lie in improving patient outcomes.

In particular, he said his team was now working on new techniques to reduce post-operative pain, new methods to reduce blood loss in joint replacement patients and the surgical management of patients on anti-coagulant medication.

“There is always something new to discover or improve and I remain keen to explore and unravel the inconsistencies we still see in patient outcomes; the mysteries of the human body you could say.”

With Karen Murphy