



# Helen Mason

Healthy, thriving communities, Kia Momoho Te Hāpori Ōranga.



21 February 2019

## Dr Hugh Lees

*Medical Director Dr Hugh Lees was recently awarded a Distinguished Clinical Teacher Award from the University of Auckland's School of Medicine. Here Hugh talks about his teaching background and philosophy.*



I felt very honoured and grateful to my colleagues who nominated me for the award. It was a very significant event for me particularly because so many people were there, peers, mentors, family and friends of mine, which made it all the more special.

I first began teaching when I became a medical registrar at Tauranga Hospital way back in 1979. I don't feel clinical teaching is something which has necessarily ever come naturally to me but it's something I feel is very important. I've always felt strongly about the part of the Hippocratic Oath which talks about passing on knowledge to the next generation.

The last paragraph of the Declaration of Professional Dedication that I signed at my graduation in 1976 reads: I promise as a graduate of medicine that I will promote the welfare and maintain the reputation of the medical profession. I also accept my responsibility to pass on the knowledge I have gained and recognise my debt to my preceptors. That's a philosophy and ethic which has been a strong motivation for me throughout my career.

I was particularly inspired in my early years by the then sole paediatrician at Tauranga Hospital, Dr Ken Dawson, and also by my long-time friend and mentor John Fleming and more recently my younger colleagues.

I feel I've been very fortunate to pursue a career in general paediatrics. It is the most marvellous career to be a part of. I like to say that every day you come to work you don't know what patient is going to be placed in front of you or what part of the textbook you will need to open to treat them. We are an age-defined, rather than organ-defined, speciality and that means we cover the gamut of conditions for patients from very young infants through to adolescents. It is such a stimulating area of medicine.

I've always felt that teaching is part of the job, it's not additional, it happens organically. The mantra in medicine for me growing up was: see one, do one, teach one. It's a bit more measured than that now of course but the essence of that holds true.

## The scourge of email

The executive team has been concerned for some time now about the role of email in our working lives. It can be a great vehicle for work if used in the correct way but it can also become something which is onerous, with too many superfluous emails being sent requiring our time, energy and responses.

In one sample week in December, 121,000 internal emails and 65,000 external emails were received by our staff. Unmanageable volumes of email can be a significant stressor. I know of colleagues who clear their email in their own time, which is clearly not a situation which can continue. Email can end up controlling us, when we need to control it.

As a working society we seem to have an ever-growing tendency to email rather than pick up a phone or walk down the corridor to speak to someone. Other poor email habits include: copying in lots of people unnecessarily into an email; a lack of clear instruction within emails (is it for approval, for action; for information); also people sending unnecessarily long emails rather than simply giving the two sentences really required. This last example makes me think of a story about Winston Churchill. He once started a very long letter to an acquaintance as follows: "I'm sorry I've written you such a long letter. I didn't have time to write a short one." It does take more time and effort to be succinct. It does help the receiver and save time if you're able to do it.

Organisationally we are doing some work around developing protocols and guidance for email, as well as for meetings, so that we're not wasting people's time unnecessarily. It's too early to share this at the moment but it is coming.

## Rocks, pebbles, sand and coffee

The executive team had a very helpful session recently with time management coach Phil Jones. Phil gave us some really good work management tips, to enable us to focus on what's important. It brought to mind a story about rocks, pebbles, sand and coffee which, if you haven't heard it, goes like this.

A teacher stands before a class with a large empty jar, a pile of rocks, a pile of pebbles and sand. He then proceeds to fill the jar with the rocks. He asks the students if the jar is full and they reply that it is.



continued over

**"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."**

*Former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (1874–1965)*

He then adds small pebbles to the jar, and gives it a shake so the pebbles disperse themselves amongst the larger rocks. Once again he asks if the jar is full and again the students say it is.

The professor then pours sand into the jar to fill up any remaining empty space. The students then agree the jar is completely full.

Used as a metaphor for our working lives, the jar represents everything that is in that life. The rocks are equivalent to the most important projects we want to achieve. The pebbles represent the things in your working life that matter, but that are not critical.

Finally, the sand represents the remaining fillers. These things can take up a lot of time, that leaves no space for the important things, if we're not careful!

The idea here is that if you start with putting sand into the jar, you will not have room for the rocks or pebbles. This holds true with the things you let into your working life. If you spend all of your time on the small and insignificant things, you will run out of time for the things that are actually important.

In order to have a more effective and satisfying working life, pay most attention to the rocks. If you solve the big issues first by putting the rocks in the jar first, the small issues can still fall into place. The reverse is not true.

For his finale, the professor takes his cup of coffee and pours in into the jar, proving that no matter how many important things you have to do, together with smaller tasks, there's always time for a cup of coffee!

The story is about first making space to do the really important stuff, the stuff that's going to make the most difference, and get you ahead. So what are those things which are really important to you, and how will you make sure you get to them first?