



Extending a helping hand to the region

In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, a UWA physician and a Perth entrepreneur established an institute that makes it easier for Perth-based specialists to reach disaster areas and for Indonesian health workers to receive training in emergency medicine.

Legacies come in different forms – from bequeathed wealth to a life well-lived in terms of investments in ‘social capital’.

For local entrepreneur Michael Henderson, an Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, the legacy of two extraordinary grandfathers spans both, and has spurred his own promotion of international healthcare, his engagement with this University and his role in a UWA-based institute that raises the profile of our State as a ‘good neighbour’ to the region.

“Both my grandfathers considered public service to be a family obligation,” observes A/Professor Henderson as he reflects on the life and work of two much-honoured men, Dr Gilbert Henderson and George Boucher.

Dr Henderson was a specialist in oral surgery who worked tirelessly to improve dental standards and was a founding member of the State Branch of the Australian Dental Association. A clinical teacher, administrator and surgeon, he set up the maxillofacial division at Royal Perth Hospital and his long association with UWA is remembered in the G D Henderson Prize in Oral Surgery.

George Boucher’s contribution to the State benefitted young and old. His many commitments

included serving as Chair of the board of Princess Margaret Hospital for three decades and as Vice-Chairman of the Homes of Peace (now Brightwater). A Commander Brother of the Order of St John of Jerusalem for his services to St Johns Ambulance, he was on the board of the precursor of the Lotteries Commission and was a Trustee of the College of Nursing.

“Being the product of two people who did much to improve health facilities in and beyond this State, I wanted to continue a family tradition of community service,” says A/Professor Henderson, who is Chief



Above: Devastated Meulaboh, in Aceh, from an Australian C41 Hercules doing a survey of the coastal area (Photo © The West Australian). Right: Professor Bruce Robinson with one of the children who survived the 2004 tsunami that killed their parents

Executive of the major international architectural firm Sandover Pinder and Chairman of the Australia Indonesia Business Council WA.

“What I find rewarding is bringing together like minds, creating sustainable entities with good governance and what I am doing now in international healthcare is to use my corporate resources and skills to establish a global aid institute that has huge potential – and that capitalises on the amazing medical specialists we have in this State.”

It was a phone call from one of those specialists, his good friend Winthrop Professor Bruce Robinson – recognised internationally for his work on asbestos-related disease and cancer immunology – which was the starting point for the UWA-based International Skills and Training Institute in Health (ISTIH) that will be launched later this year.

At the time, television screens were full of images of the devastating effects of the 2004 tsunami on our nearest neighbour and the UWA specialist was frustrated at the pace of response. He wanted to get to Aceh and asked Michael Henderson to send a plea for help with transport through the entrepreneur’s corporate networks.

Within hours a flight had been organised plus a helicopter to take Professor Robinson into the disaster zone. Because he was working with an Indonesian team he was able to operate in areas of the devastated province that high profile aid organisations hadn’t been able to reach.

It was traumatic work at Meulaboh Hospital, south of Banda Aceh, which was hardest hit by the tsunami. The UWA professor recalls the children orphaned by the devastating waves of water. “They were playing soccer when it hit, but they were good swimmers. They lived on the street near our hospital tent and we fed them every day. You could see the sadness in their faces. The day we heard their stories I got back to my room late at night, shut the door and just wept for them and the thousands like them. That is why we go to help.”

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With the emergency behind them, the entrepreneur and the physician were determined to pool their corporate and medical networks by establishing the International Skills and Training Institute of Health. Their initiative had strong appeal and they soon rallied a core of support including this University, WA Health and Curtin University of Technology, Deloitte and Clayton Utz. And almost immediately, there were promises of funds from individuals and the business and broader community.

Says Professor Robinson: “There’s a big natural disaster in Indonesia about once a year – for example recently both a tsunami and a volcanic eruption – and we’re well placed in this State to respond. We knew we needed a two-fold approach for the Institute: training local health workers in their own countries and having the capacity to respond to disasters. And it’s proving to be very effective.”

Proof of that is the Institute’s response to several major disasters in recent years. ISTIH’s node in Indonesia – based at the University of Indonesia and the 2,900 bed CIPTO Public Hospital – has mobilised teams and resources during the 2010 tsunami and has despatched emergency teams to earthquakes in Sumatra (2008) and Haiti (2010).

“Doctors trained in part by Professor Robinson over the last five years were among the first aid groups to arrive in the Mentawi Islands, the area worst hit by the recent tsunami,” says A/Professor Henderson.

“One of ISTIH’s main areas of work in our region is the provision of high quality emergency medicine training. Because most of the victims of disasters die in the first 12 to 24 hours, it’s vital that on the ground health providers are highly trained in emergency medicine.

The initiative has been welcomed by the Indonesian Government and the University of



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Indonesia. With Indonesian health workers benefitting from training at the impressive facilities at UWA's Clinical Training and Education Centre (CTEC), the idea of establishing a similar facility in Indonesia was born. The \$40m facility in Jakarta is now nearing completion and will be officially opened early in May.

But Michael Henderson and Bruce Robinson are not relaxing; they would like to see the Institute's achievements in Indonesia duplicated throughout the region. "The Institute can provide specialist advice in the development of aid projects, policy, the development of skills and training for health workers and other global aid needs," says A/Professor Henderson, "Because of our expanding activities in the region, we'd like to see more AusAID funding coming into WA."

Professor Robinson adds: "The Institute's approach is multidisciplinary in managing aid projects and we collaborate with government and non-government organisations. With its range of alliances, ISTIH can provide a holistic approach to the provision of services to the aid sector."

At present the physician and the entrepreneur are looking forward to the official opening of the Indonesian Clinical Training and Education Centre and that of the UWA-based Institute at the Claremont campus.

"The corporate community is responding brilliantly, with people like Harold Clough stepping onto the board of the Institute, and major legal and accounting corporations throwing their support behind the initiative," says A/Professor Henderson. "We've also benefitted from the help of professionals volunteering assistance and UWA Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alan Robson, has been particularly supportive.

"Until recently we've been working under the radar with Bruce and me juggling much of the work with our own professional commitments, but now we feel the time is right to make people aware of just how much has been achieved by ISTIH to date and to start mapping out our vision for the future.

"For me, having established the Institute is a wonderful return for the support that the University has provided to many clever people in our community – people like Professor Fiona Stanley, Professor Bruce Robinson and Professor Allan Kermode.

I would like to see ISTIH grow and become a much more effective catalyst for delivering health outcomes across the region. We talk a lot about building economic partnerships with our neighbours, but if at the same time we fail to build community outcomes, we lose part of the value of such endeavours.

"This University has a strong track record of engaging with the region and my hope is that the Institute can add value to these links, so that the profiles of our universities – and that of our State – are enhanced by being a good neighbour."

A/Professor Henderson, among other professional positions, is Chairman of the Board of Governors of



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ISTIH. The board of the Institute includes Dr Harold Clough, Chairman of McRae Investments; Mr David Singleton, CEO of Poseidon Nickel; Mr Peter Iancov, CEO of DORIC; Mr Michael Schoch, Vice-President, Production in Australia, Shell Development; Mr Brett Mattes, CEO Energy, Barito Pacific Group, Jakarta and Star Energy Holdings, Singapore; Professor Ian Puddy, Dean of UWA's Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Science; Professor Bruce Robinson, Professor in Medicine at the UWA School of Medicine and Pharmacology; Dr Andrew Robertson, Director of Disaster Management, Regulation and Planning in the Public Health Division of WA Health; and Associate Professor Celia Cornwell, Dean (International) Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University.

*Above: Wearing the T-shirts promoting the NGO that ISTIH works with, Professor Robinson conducts bronchoscopy training at Meulaboh Hospital, just south of Banda Aceh, which was hardest hit by the 2004 tsunami
Inset: Adjunct Professor Michael Henderson*

>> CONTACT

**Professor Bruce Robinson, Director
International Skills and Training Institute in Health**
Phone: +61 (0) 419 926 109
Email: bruce.robinson@istih.org
**A/Professor Michael Henderson, Chairman
International Skills and Training Institute in Health**
Phone: +61 (0) 418 760 000
Email: michael.henderson@istih.org