

Guidance for writing biographies

Introduction

This document provides guidance on writing a life story for the biography section of the RACGP history webpages. Biographies, or autobiographies, should aim to cover the subject's personal background as well as their involvement in general practice and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), in particular, and include their memories and insights on medical, professional and social issues as they relate to these.

The ideal length for a researched in-depth biography is 1000 – 2000 words (between two and four A4 pages) including at least one good quality image (minimum 700 KB as a rough guide).

Conducting an interview

Most biographies are based on interviews so some hints and tips for conducting these are provided below, along with suggested questions and talking points.

A Planning the interview:

- Before the interview, find out as much as possible regarding the interviewee's areas of RACGP involvement and personal background (the RACGP Archives team can assist with this, if required).
- Make contact to arrange the interview – including:
 - o time, place and expected duration
 - o outline your objectives
 - o ask them to bring photographs, memorabilia.

B Start the interview proper with personal background including:

- date and place of birth
- why/how interviewee chose medicine
- medical educational background
- general practice experience
- community involvements.

C RACGP-focused talking points or questions:

- Why and when did they join the RACGP?
- Areas of significant involvement on behalf of the RACGP.
- Which activity was he/she most significantly involved in?
- What do they believe have been the challenges to the RACGP and how have they been met?
- What has been achieved especially during their time in the RACGP?
- What have been the failures?
- Have there been "great debates" and special issues? What were the differing views argued?
- What have been the changes in the role, management and organisation of general practice?
- Who were the people they felt made particularly valuable contributions to either the RACGP or general practice during his/her period of active involvement?
- Why were these people seen to be especially significant?
- Any other subjects the interviewee would like to raise?

D Other possible talking points to consider depending on the person being interviewed:

- Recognising and dealing with prejudice whether it be for religious, racial, gender, occupational or socioeconomic reasons
- Dealing with intransigent bureaucracy
- Dealing with medico legal issues
- Dealing with incompetent or impaired colleagues
- Dealing with the media
- Advocating for the skills and abilities of GPs
- Dealing with crises of confidence and of conscience
- Did they achieve work / life balance?

E General interviewing principles:

- Be an interested listener
- Don't interrupt - let the subject complete a story;
- Take notes and ask relevant questions after the person has stopped talking
- Follow a particular subject through
- Ask the interviewee to be specific eg if interviewee says someone was an important person ask them to be more specific, find out in what way, eg Can you give me some specific examples?
- During the interview use any documents or photos the interviewee brought with them as talking points
- Use open ended questions and follow up with more direct questions only to clarify points of detail
- Pick up leads and note them so you can return to them later

The process

All biographies submitted are reviewed by the history screening panel (made up of history committee members) and checked for historical accuracy. Panel suggestions or comments are returned for author response and, if necessary, historical 'fact-checks' are conducted by the Archives and History team. The panel and author approved text is then reviewed by the RACGP Legal team and subsequently sent to the Publications team for editing, layout and application of 'house-style'. The fully edited and laid out version is returned for final author approval before publication to the history pages of the RACGP website.