

Julie Lawrence
1957 - 2019



Surgeon Julie Lawrence SOURCE: Supplied, by the family

JULIE Lawrence became the first woman plastic surgeon in South Australia and she supported and mentored young women doctors seeking a career in the specialised field.

She was born to a country policeman in the Mallee town of Lameroo, the only daughter of Win and Kelvin Ragless, with two older brothers.

They came up to Adelaide in 1961 when Kelvin joined a two-man police station on Goodwood Rd and Julie went to Colonel Light Gardens Primary School. His next posting was to Barmera, where Julie went to Glossop High School, and kept busy with sport and Girl Guides.

Naracoorte followed, and Julie was dux of her senior year at the local high school. She set out to be a teacher but at University of Adelaide went from studying organic chemistry to being accepted into medicine.

It was while being rotated through plastic surgery at the Royal Adelaide Hospital that she decided where her future lay. She graduated in 1982, took a year off for the birth of her son, Ben, and decided to apply for a position in plastic surgery.

That saw her move to Christchurch, New Zealand, to begin five years of specialist training. After being admitted as a fellow of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons in 1991, she next studied to become a fellow in the UK and US. Julie then returned to Adelaide as the state's first woman plastic surgeon.

Her work led to her consulting in surgeries around Adelaide, gradually extending to Fleurieu Peninsula, Victor Harbor, and then the Royal Darwin Hospital and Darwin Private Hospital as a visiting specialist. She also did volunteer work in Fiji.

Julie was the first surgeon to operate in the Flinders Private Hospital when it opened in 1999. In all, she cared for more than 20,000 patients and, during her career, saw a rapid increase in the number of people seeking cosmetic surgery in Adelaide.

She noted that it was an era when people were becoming much more open about their cosmetic treatments.

As she became experienced, Julie turned to mentoring new doctors and surgeons.

In 2000, she met Steve Meldrum at a party and they married in 2003, forming a blended family with two sons.

They were able to build a home together, and travelled widely, with Julie indulging her passions as a dressmaker and artist.

In 2016, a diagnosis of motor neurone disease spelled the end to her surgeon's career although she continued to enjoy travelling widely up until shortly before her death.

Credit: Randal Sach