SPEECH OF MR ANTHONY HOWARD QC DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE 25TH AUSTRALASIAN MILITARY MEDICINE ASSOCIATION (AMMA) CONFERENCE

FRIDAY 14 OCTOBER 2016

Dr Greg Mahoney, President of AMMA
Rear Admiral Jenny Firman, Patron of AMMA
Air Vice Marshal Tracey Smart, Commander of Joint Health and Surgeon General of the Australian Defence Force
All Directors-General of the three services, both permanent and reserve
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I send warmest greetings from my wife Governor Linda Dessau. Unfortunately she has lost her voice and regrets she is unable to deliver her proposed speech this morning. Indeed, in making that decision she is complying absolutely with her doctor’s advice – something I am sure you would all approve of! But don’t worry, her indisposition is only temporary, so my present advantage will not last for long!

I only resigned as a judge last week so I could be more involved in our community activities - after 10 years on the bench and 33 years practising criminal law - but I did not expect to be thrown in the deep end so soon! However, I am delighted to join you to officially open this conference on behalf of the Governor.

First, in the spirit of reconciliation with our indigenous communities, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any elders here with us this morning.
The Governor was appointed Governor of Victoria on 1 July last year. For our international guests, the summary of this role is that the Governor is appointed as the Queen’s representative, to oversee our State’s Constitution and sign in the law passed by Parliament, to greet diplomats, to preside over ceremonial occasions, to engage with and bring people together right across our community and to promote our State’s economic and social well-being here and abroad.

The Governor wanted me to say from the outset that she is no expert in medicine, let alone military medicine. She is a lawyer by trade; a judge for the last 28 years of her career. However, a privileged part of her role is the contact that she has with the military and the veterans’ community. It has given her an appreciation of your work that could not be as keenly understood in her previous life as a judge.

She has relished listening to our veterans of different wars and those of peacekeeping forces, talking with the Military Aides who support us at Government House and reading about Australia’s military efforts.

The Governor’s learning has been considerably enhanced, having just toured the Western Front with Major-General David McLachlan AO (Retd), the head of our Returned Services League. As she put it on her recent return, it was impossible not to stand on those battlefields, and in those cemeteries, without pondering the conditions that the thousands of young soldiers, and their medical carers, confronted a century ago.

She spoke also of being forced to consider those challenging circumstances for medical carers when she recently opened an exhibition featuring photographs and memorabilia of the ANZAC nurses of World War 1. She was struck by the task of caring for an unending stream of injured and dying soldiers, day in and day out; especially doing so facing the challenge of - short or non existent supplies, virulent infection and of squalid conditions or dirty, crowded and cramped tent hospitals, or
dark and dank hospital ships, always at the mercy of the weather and often under threat of bombing and/or artillery fire.

Of course, those provocations in the field did not end with the Great War. Each engagement since then has brought its own special challenges, including fighting in dense tropical growth or in desert conditions, or without the battlefronts of traditional warfare.

The Governor’s experience on the Western Front helped her understand how advances in wartime medical care actually promote improved care in peacetime. The First World War, as you well know, changed the ways that soldiers were cared for. Such was the inevitable response to new weaponry of the time, and new technologies such as blood transfusion, control of infection and improved surgery. All this ultimately improved medical care in the broader community. There are many examples of broadly applied advances and developments as a direct result of combat medicine - aeromedical evacuation, damage control surgery, identification and treatment of traumatic brain injury, improvements in blood banking, management of infectious diseases and the invention of dressings such as QuikClot – to name but a few.

We can all be grateful that your body of knowledge directly informs and advances medical products, techniques and treatments in the civilian population. The Governor is pleased to note how your work has evolved to meet the contemporary needs of the men and the women who serve. Your emphasis in this conference on mental health, resilience and reintegration into military and civilian life is a case in point. No doubt this work informs those issues on a broader basis in the community.

The Governor is also impressed by your demonstrated capacity for collaboration. That is obvious from your cross-disciplinary work and the research you undertake outside the military. That sort of collaboration is integral to the best research and medical improvements. We see that clearly here in Victoria. Forgive me for a little hometown bias if I emphasise that Victoria is considered one of the top 5 biotech centres in the world, with 150 biotech firms, and over 10,000 researchers and
clinicians in over 25 major facilities. The Governor hopes you may have time to visit some while you are here.

The Governor and I are delighted that you have chosen Victoria as the venue to host this conference. There is a nice symmetry in being here for your 20th and now your 25th anniversary. I understand that you have a large membership base in Victoria. But whether you are in that group or from elsewhere, we hope that during your conference you will find time to discover why Melbourne has just been voted the World’s Most Liveable City for the 6th consecutive year. It is important to have some time off from your work, to free your minds in our colourful laneways or whilst enjoying our excellent coffee.

If you can see other parts of our State too, all the better – such as the spectacular coast on the Great Ocean Road, the wineries of the Yarra Valley, or our extraordinary natural life, including the penguins at Philip Island.

The Governor and I wish you well in your deliberations over the coming days. We are conscious that what is shared here this week is likely to inspire and refine the outstanding work that you do, work that can and will save lives. We are grateful to you.

And so, it is now my pleasure on behalf of the Governor to declare the 25th Australasian Military Medicine Association Conference OFFICIALLY OPEN!