Millen Gordon Mackay

MB ChB (NZ) DPM (Melb) MANZCP FRANZP. Born 8 April 1924 in Palmerston North, died 15 February 2013 in Orewa.

Millen Mackay, psychiatrist, had a long career in public health in New Zealand and ended up running large psychiatric hospitals and introducing psychiatry to smaller remote New Zealand towns.

He was the son of Donald Mackay who was a doctor who served in World War 1; he joined the RAMC and was gassed on the Somme and invalided back to the UK eventually to return to NZ as a general practitioner in many places including Palmerston North, Paparoa, Huntly, Dunedin and Auckland.

Millen was born in Palmerston North in 1924. Millen commenced his medical training at Otago University in 1942 after serving 3 years in the military. He then took his psychiatric and psychology degrees in Melbourne.

In 1974 he spent 3 months touring psychiatric hospitals and facilities throughout England and the United States.

Millen was on the Board of Governors for Mana College for several years and in made the recommendation of more physical exercise which had positive effects. He was a very keen regular tennis player eventually playing the sport for an amazing 75 years!

He married Alice Christine Tunstall in 1947. They met at Auckland Hospital where she was practising as a newly qualified nurse. His wife worked at Auckland Hospital, Wellington Hospital, and Cook Hospital. Later in Gisborne she became a trained phlebotomist and was a long-standing maternity nurse. Millen said of his wife that she was superb at dealing with very difficult children’s injuries like serious burns.

Together they had four sons (Donald, Keith, Ross, and Neil) and two daughters (June and Heather). He also has eight grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

He took pride in the fact that he never turned a patient away and provided humane treatment in a field that still to this day is very much neglected by doctors as a field that is too difficult and or not attractive. He noted that psychiatry had changed since his day in that he rarely experienced violent patients!

Dr Mackay worked in the mental health field for 34 years. He worked at Avondale Hospital for 3 months at the end of 1947, and then from 1950 to 1952. He then worked at Seacliff Hospital in Dunedin from 1954 to 1955.

In 1953 he spent a year doing a postgraduate degree in Psychiatry in Melbourne Australia. Dr Mackay then (in 1955) became Chief Medical Officer in Porirua Hospital until 1963 when he was promoted to Medical Superintendent. He held this
position until 1972 when he left Porirua. During his 17 years at Porirua he was also
Visiting Psychiatrist for Wellington Hospital and a forensic psychiatrist. Porirua
Hospital provided the psychiatric services for Wellington Hospital and staffed its
psychiatric wards. At that stage, patients from all over the lower North Island were
being admitted into Wellington Hospital where they remained for 2 or 3 weeks before
being transferred to Porirua Hospital if they had not recovered.

After leaving Porirua Hospital in 1972 he took up the position of Psychiatrist and later
Medical Superintendent at Cook Hospital in Gisborne. He remained as Superintendent
for only 2 years as the dual position was too administrative and he wanted to return to
full time psychiatry.

In 1974 he became the Psychiatrist for the East Cape region, a position he held for
approximately 10 years, retiring in 1984. He was the doctor who facilitated Cook
Hospital’s registration as a psychiatric hospital and introduced the training of
psychiatric nurses there.

To quote him from his private notes, “In all my years of being a psychiatrist I never
received any complaints from anyone about my treatment or care of them despite
dealing with many people who were resentful for being in hospital or about their care.
This was something after 34 years in psychiatry I was very proud of.”

Neil Mackay and the Mackay family provided this obituary.