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# Contact Lens and Anterior Eye

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## Vale Professor Barry Leighton Cole (1936–2021)

On January 27, 2021, the optometry world lost one of its giants. Numerous obituaries are being written about Professor Barry Cole, detailing his career and accomplishments, so I shall take a slightly different tack and describe the man, with some examples to support the observations. Suffice to say that he became the first full-time teacher at the Victorian College of Optometry in Melbourne Australia in 1959 and for the next 40 plus years carved out an extraordinary career marked by his tenure as Director of the College plus Head of the Department of Optometry at the University of Melbourne. His influence on optometry on a state, national and international level was and remains profound.

He was a visionary. Cole did not assume the role he played in optometry, he created it. There was no blueprint. From his helm in Melbourne, he shaped and empowered the blossoming discipline of optometry over the course of his tenure, playing a major role in elevating it to the standing it holds within Australian society today. Recognizing the importance of research in a university course, Cole, along with his colleagues John Nathan and Geoff Henry, embraced the opportunity. The environment ultimately created launched careers of many national and international vision research stars, including Robert Hess, Tony Adams, Don Mitchell, Brian Brown, Brien Holden, Rod Watkins, Leon Garner, Ian Bailey, Jan Lovie-Kitchin, Ken Bowman, Leo Carney, Nathan Efron, David Atchison, Algis Vingrys, Konrad Pesudovs, Suzi Fleiszig, Erica Fletcher, and Shaban Demirel to name but a few. Cole referred to this as his missionary work and it may well endure as his primary legacy.

He was a planner. From humble beginnings, the College evolved under Cole's direction into a powerhouse institution, becoming a major healthcare provider, administrator of a low-cost government healthcare scheme and a scholarly and (mostly) non-political home for Victorian optometry. There was always some construction going on at the College's building. A would-be architect, Cole oversaw continuous major capital works culminating in the marvellous home for optometry in Melbourne that now bears his name.

He was an opportunist. As Pasteur said, 'fortune favours the prepared mind'. Social, political and economic factors can never be accurately predicted. Cole often took advantage of changes in university policy and cracks in relationships to advance the cause of optometry. College finances had always been a challenge. The inclusion of optometry in

Australia's national health insurance scheme in 1975 provided an opportunity to appropriately fund and expand the College clinics. In 1985, he pulled off a major coup by rapidly developing a plan of action to exploit a vague idea prior to a state government election. The result was the Victorian Eyecare Service which has allowed some 2 million Victorians to receive subsidized glasses, contact lenses and visual aids to date. Under his watch, state government funding to the College rose from \$6500 in 1973 to \$3 million in 2000.

He had an incisive intellect. Whether it be visiting scholars or local post-graduate students presenting their work from across the numerous fields within the vision sciences, Cole was inevitably able to ask piercing questions or make insightful observations on the topic at hand. Naturally he applied this ability to his lobbying within the profession, to government bodies or to the university hierarchy to further the cause of professional optometry.

He was a bon vivant. He loved good food, wine and company. He enjoyed travelling and the arts. He was a fan of the Geelong football club and a late-comer to the game of golf.

We mourn the loss but celebrate the legacy.



Professor Barry Cole (with permission from the Kett museum of the Australian College of Optometry)

Noel A. Brennan  
*Johnson & Johnson Vision, Jacksonville, FL, USA*  
 E-mail address: [NBrenna2@ITS.JNJ.com](mailto:NBrenna2@ITS.JNJ.com).