Lorna Mellor, 1936-2020

On Saturday 2nd May 2020, Lorna Mellor AM, passed after a long illness. She was one of the first non-health care members of ISPAD, a founding member of JDRF, and an Honorary President of IDF. She was an outstanding patient advocate, and with her husband funded the first diabetes educator position in Australia in 1978. She was an invited speaker at ISPAD Conferences on the importance of education and psychosocial support for the child, parents and family and lectured at the first five ISPAD Science Schools for Health Professionals.

Lorna and her husband Brian made an enormous contribution in improving the care of children with Type 1 diabetes nationally and internationally. This followed the diagnosis of their 5 year old daughter, Christine in the late 1960s. Although they sought the best available care at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children in Camperdown, they soon identified a huge and unmet need for comprehensive diabetes education and psychosocial support from dedicated and experienced diabetes educators rather than the ad hoc care then provided by ward nursing staff with little or no expertise in the field. To this end, Lorna and Brian together with Susan Dryza established the parents’ group DIABS with the motto of “self help through education” enabling hundreds of parents in NSW to learn through each other’s experiences and to provide the much needed psychosocial support coping with the demands of having a child with Type 1 diabetes. Then through their generous support, Lorna and Brian funded the first paediatric diabetes educator in Australia, Associate Professor Margaret McGill AM.

The Mellors, supported by Geraldine and Clive Pack, founded the national organisation the Diabetes Youth Foundation in 1979 which subsequently evolved into the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation of Australia (JDFA) and is now part of JDRF.

Lorna, with a background in teaching, took an active interest in developing diabetes education as a key facet of any diabetes care program. She also recognised the need to support the families of children with diabetes with innovative and creative programs such as the Children’s Camping Program.

Both Lorna and Brian understood the importance of research into improved therapies as well as prevention and were unstintingly generous in their financial support. Lorna was singlehandedly responsible for first establishing the JDFA research program for Australia and then setting up systems to ensure the magnificent support that Australian researchers now receive from the JDFI.

In 1988, Lorna and Professor John Turtle AO were co-convenors of the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) Congress in Sydney, Australia. Lorna’s role in the IDF was later recognised when she was named an Honorary President of the organisation – a particularly significant honour for someone whose background was not in medicine or science. She worked very hard to establish recognition for children within the IDF. Together with Professor Martin Silink AO she established the IDF Consultative Section on Children and Adolescents. Lorna
was the link between ISPAD and IDF before, during and after Martin’s presidency. She brought the organisations together. Despite being a “pocket rocket”, Lorna will be remembered by many of us as a larger than life figure, with boundless energy and enthusiasm and a great sense of fun. She was motivated by a wish to see all children with diabetes receive the best possible care and for their families to be supported through what was often a very stressful and demanding daily regimen. Through her volunteer work she has improved the lives of many children with diabetes and their families throughout the world. She has left behind many friends all over the world who will miss her. Our thoughts are with her family and many friends.