‘The Spark of Life’

In November 1974, the College’s Faculty of Anaesthetists “convened a meeting of 95 representatives – medical advisors and lay educators from 40 organisations actively involved in the teaching of Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation”. The meeting aimed to discuss the standardisation of the teaching and technique of Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation in Australia and New Zealand. It was the genesis of what was to become the Australian Resuscitation Council (ARC).

The aim of organisation envisioned by anaesthetists such as Tess Brophy and strongly supported by the College Council, was to “correlate and disseminate information about resuscitation equipment and techniques”. It was to be established in Australia and New Zealand and include “representatives of professional groups – medical, paramedical and legal – voluntary community-based organisations, industry and commerce, the Standards Association and industrial and health authorities”.

In October 1975, Ken Jamieson, a neurosurgeon who was Council representative on the Faculty of Anaesthetists, issued a report concerning the formation of the Australian Resuscitation Council. Jamieson, who was active on the College’s Trauma Committee, was interested in head injuries, particularly those caused by motor accidents. Noticeably, a few months later he published ‘The Ambulance Survey’ which “emphasised patient care at the scene of the accident and during transit”. In his report to Council, Jamieson proposed that the ARC’s Memorandum of Association and Constitution be adopted and recommended that the College be a major sponsor of the organisation. He also suggested that four representatives from the College (three from the Faculty) – Ken Jamieson, Tess Brophy, Maurice Sando and David Crankshaw join the newly formed organisation.

Jamieson’s recommendations were endorsed by Council and the ARC was formally launched on February 7, 1976. Unfortunately, Ken Jamieson died 10 days after the launch and his place was filled by Peter Braithwaite who became the first Chairman of the ARC. Other foundation members of the ARC included the Red Cross, Heart Foundation, the Defence Medical Services, ambulance services and organisations involved in lifesaving and nursing.

The Australian Resuscitation Council currently has seven state branches which are integral to the

vision for the organisation. In 1975, prior to the formation of the ARC, a seminar on 'Accident Prevention and Community First Aid' had been held in NSW. And in the Council minutes of February 1976, Wyn Beasley reported on the working party that had been set up to form a New Zealand Resuscitation Council. Modelled on the Australian organisation, the New Zealand body was not established until 1996.

Seminal aims of the ARC were to "promote uniformity and standardisation of resuscitation techniques' and to 'foster and co-ordinate the teaching of resuscitation". The President's Newsletter of 1978 includes the 'Proceedings of the ARC' and makes reference to the inconsistencies in the teaching of the 'coma position'. It emerged that the Red Cross and St John Ambulance taught a different version of the position to their members. With a view to standardising techniques and teaching methods, the ARC instigated a review of the teaching methods of organisations in each state.

Although sponsored by the College the early ARC did not have a permanent home or any funding. ARC Executive Officer Carol Carey remembers Tess Brophy (later Professor Tess Cramond) used her own secretary for ARC meetings and transported papers from Brisbane to Melbourne in a suitcase. In 1985 a seeding grant from the Department of Health enabled the ARC to set up in an office donated by the College. When the Anaesthetists formed their own College in 1992, sponsorship of the ARC was shared by RACS and ANZCA.

In 1993, the ARC established the 'Spark of Life' resuscitation conferences – these were held triennially and included speakers from Australia and abroad. Since that time, the ARC has increased its activities – producing publications and through initiatives such as 'easy access to defibrillation for sudden cardiorespiratory arrest', constantly improving and promoting the importance of resuscitation techniques.

The principal task of the ARC is to satisfy its objectives by preparing guidelines that govern the way resuscitation is taught and practised in Australia. Although some representatives can be funded by member organisations, the ARC is a voluntary organisation and with a history spanning 37 years, it is internationally renowned. Up to three members attend meetings of the 'International Liaison Committee on Resuscitation (ILCOR)', representing the 'Australian New Zealand Council on Resuscitation (ANZCOR)'. In April 2013, the ARC hosted the ILCOR meeting in Melbourne.