

Albury's Radiation Pioneers

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Wilhelm Roentgen discovered Roentgen rays (X-rays) in Wurzburg, Germany in November 1895. Their use in Albury was first demonstrated less than a year later.

On October 15, 1896, the *Border Post* reported that Doctors Kennedy and Woods, with help from local photographer Mr W Watson, had used the rays to treat a cancer patient in Albury. On October 16, the *Albury Daily News* reported Watson's lecture in Wodonga: "Mr Watson showed some photographs locating shot in the arm and other foreign bodies in the flesh, thus proving the value of Roentgen rays in surgical operations."

These early experiments are believed to be the first use of radiation therapy in Australia. Albury had a population of about 5500 in 1896 and to have a photographer with X-ray facilities and a medical practitioner experimenting in Radiation Oncology at this time, is quite remarkable.

Patrick Kennedy was born in 1852 in Killaloe, County Clare, Ireland. He arrived in Australia with his parents as a five-year old before returning to Ireland to qualify as a doctor. He returned to Australia, eventually settling in Albury in 1880 where he practised until his death in 1923.

It appears that Mr Watson saw a commercial opportunity to use the rays for a range of uses. With James Scanlan of Albury Cycle Agency, he used X-rays to detect flaws in bicycle frames. Scanlan also deserves recognition as this may be the first use of industrial radiography in Australia.

The first patient treated was Patrick Connor of Murrumbidgee Station in the Kiewa Valley. Connor had throat cancer and it is reported that his death was imminent on or about October 5. Dr Kennedy suggested X-ray treatment but was not optimistic. The patient however agreed to the treatment and recovered slightly before dying on December 8, 1896. It would be many years before appropriately controlled doses would see long-term positive results for patients receiving radiation therapy.

Research shows that Connor was the first recorded case of a patient in Australia being treated by a doctor using X-ray therapy as part of treatment.

Doctors Cleaver Woods and Patrick Kennedy both gave a lifetime of service to the people of Albury district and both showed amazing foresight in utilising Roentgen's discovery. They were indeed early pioneers of radiology in Australia. Dr Kennedy should be recognised as the first experimenter in Australia using X-rays for the treatment of cancer.

More information relating to this article can be found at Albury LibraryMuseum as an A&DHS Society Paper researched and written by Chris McQuellin.



Dr Patrick Kennedy