

FLINDERS UNIVERSITY

Citation for the Award of a Doctor of Science *honoris causa*

Mrs Patricia Vilimas

2024 marks the 50th year of continuous employment of Patricia Vilimas (Pat) at Flinders University. While this is an outstanding achievement within any organisation, Pat's achievements are not based solely on longevity. Rather, they are best reflected by her outstanding contributions to both Flinders and to medical research.

Pat began work as a technical assistant at Flinders in 1975 within research groups focused on decoding the chemical components of the nervous system and the fundamental pathways they control. She first joined the research teams led by Professor John Furness and the late Professor Marcello Costa, who both became Fellows of the Australian Academy of Science.

This team created new ways of studying the gut nervous system. Continuous innovation was required to make this work and much of this work was undertaken by Pat. Pat developed a reputation for her thoroughness and problem-solving capacity to produce data that ultimately informed researchers from across the globe on the form and function of the enteric (gut) nervous system.

Pat subsequently became a research assistant in the laboratories headed by Professor Ian Gibbins and Professor Judy Morris. In this 30-year period, Pat was central in undertaking research that was pivotal to the creation of new knowledge in the field of autonomic neuroscience. The excellence of this research is exemplified by the fact that this team was constantly funded throughout this period by peak funding bodies, such as the National Health and Medical Research Council.

The quality of Pat's research was fundamental to this ongoing success in a time when funding rates were, and remain, challenging. What makes her contributions even more remarkable is that for much of her career she worked part-time, to manage family life.

Pat currently undertakes a research support role within the College of Medicine and Public Health's Microscopy facility, where she continues to teach and support students and young scientists in their own research.

Based on her humility to remain in the background, Pat chose not to be a co-author on most of her research. However, she is officially 'acknowledged' in over 100 peer-reviewed publications, demonstrating her contributions to these works. The impact of this research is illustrated by these publications being cited over 8,000 times by others in the field, a record many Professors will not achieve in their career.

Pat's research career is best highlighted by the words of Pat's long-time colleague and friend, Professor Ian Gibbins; "In Greek mythology, Hero was a priestess who was famous for her acts of self-sacrifice. If a priestess can be a source of otherwise hidden knowledge, and if living a life of science funded by the vagaries of the granting system counts as some kind of sacrifice, then Pat Vilimas is a true Hero in every sense of the word."

Apart from a Deans Award from the College of Medicine in 2004, Pat's contribution to Flinders University and scientific research has largely gone unrecognised. We now wish to appropriately recognise this outstanding professional staff member and woman.

In recognition of the excellence and rigour of her scientific work within the College of Medicine and Public Health at Flinders University, Patricia Vilimas is awarded a Doctor of Science *honoris causa*.