



The Sir Edward Weary

## DUNLOP ASIA AWARDS

### THE INAUGURAL DUNLOP ASIA MEDAL

Awarded this 14th day of October 1994 to *Professor Francis Alfred Billson AO, MB, BS, FRCS, FRACS, FRACO*, who through a distinguished career marked by high achievement, sustained and compassionate humanitarian service, and selfless leadership in the service of both his profession and his country, has exemplified for all Australians the indomitable spirit of Sir Edward Dunlop.

Professor Francis Billson has dedicated his life's work, as Weary Dunlop did, to healing and to the alleviation of suffering. As a student of science and medicine at The University of Melbourne, from which he graduated in 1959, Professor Billson undoubtedly drew inspiration directly from the example set by Weary, under whom he studied. Having selected ophthalmology as his field he also, like Weary Dunlop, pursued his specialist qualifications in the United Kingdom.

Following his return to Australia Professor Billson's consistent display of a rare combination of surgical skills, single-minded focus, compassion and determination to excel culminated in his appointment in 1977 as Foundation Professor of Ophthalmology at The University of Sydney; an appointment he holds today. It is from this position, with its focus on teaching and research, as well as carrying responsibility for ophthalmic surgery at the Sydney Eye Hospital and Children's Hospital, that Francis Billson's vision for enhancing the quality of life for thousands of South and Southeast Asians has flourished.

Since his founding in 1978 of *Foresight*, Australian Overseas Aid and Prevention of Blindness Ltd, each year Francis Billson has led teams of volunteer doctors into Bangladesh, working to reduce the incidence of blindness and sight impairment in that country's populace. His efforts have included the establishment of a charitable teaching hospital, the world's first Diploma of Community Ophthalmology at the University of Chittagong in 1979, and national training programs in diagnosis and corrective treatment as well as prevention. 1987 saw the endowment, from his personal funds, of a Bangladesh Institute of Community Ophthalmology and a founding professorship within it. A fivefold increase in the number of cataract surgeries performed in Bangladesh, and a similarly dramatic decrease in the incidence of eyes lost to corneal infection, bear testimony to his achievements.

In recent years, through *Foresight* Australia, Francis Billson has expanded the boundaries of his efforts within Asia, contributing to surgical, diagnostic and prevention training programs in Sri Lanka, India, China, Singapore, and Papua New Guinea. He has served, or led, most major Australian and regional organisations concerned with the treatment and prevention of blindness, and presently chairs the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness Asia-Pacific Region. He became Director of the Save Sight Institute in Sydney in 1985. His distinguished accomplishments have been recognised through an award in the Order of Australia, and by the Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology.

Throughout his career as a medical practitioner, and particularly in his work in Asia, Francis Billson has set an example through the selfless sharing and transferring of his skills and expertise, thereby not only encouraging, but enabling others to follow in his footsteps. In a broader sense, in the spirit of Weary Dunlop he has set an example for all Australians of a special type of leadership, determination, and compassion worthy of the recognition bestowed by this distinguished award.

Presented this 14th day of October 1994