

Professor Chris Del Mar
Bridges Webb Medal Winner 2014

Thank you for the honour of awarding me this medal. I treasure it for two reasons:

Firstly of course for the recognition of my work as a researcher by my fellow colleagues. That is very much appreciated. Research in primary care has come along in such leaps and bounds over the 2 and a half decades since I became an academic that this recognition is now a serious accolade. We really are making a significant contribution to pushing back the boundaries of ignorance in our field.

The second reason has a lot to do with Charles Bridges Webb himself. He was such a shining example to us fledgling researchers in (then) general practice in 1988 when I started at the University of Queensland that Peter Mudge (my boss at UQ) said I should go down and meet him to work out what general practice research actually meant. None of us really knew. And Charles was gentle, gracious and thoughtful, and had a lovely technique for drawing out each of our interests. Mine turned out to be trying to quantify the benefits and harms of what we do, but I didn't know that at the time. I remember him saying

"What you're implying is that we really need is a sort of reference book like this"

he thumped a tome on his desk,

"where we can look up the prognosis of every illness in general practice, and the benefits of each form of treatment".

Neither of us knew it then, but what he was describing was a form of Cochrane Library, and this actually came into being a few years later. Of course it came not as a book, but instead electronic, and the prognosis was de-emphasised in favour of treatment interventions. But basically Charles could picture the need for this way before its time.

I believe Charles gave similarly helpful and encouraging advice to many of fledglings, and this medal is a lovely embodiment of his spirit: helping recognise research in primary care.