

# Selfless surgery trips



Ophthalmologist Geoffrey Painter at Dalcross Private Hospital. Picture: Adam Ward

## Work saves sight of thousands

**Doug Conway**

SOME 18 million people worldwide are estimated to be blind through lack of treatment but there would be thousands more if it wasn't for Geoffrey Painter.

The Warrabee eye surgeon has given the gift of sight not only to many Australians, but to thousands in Asia and the Pacific.

He has been appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for pioneering work that has taken him on 30 trips to the Solomon Islands, China and the Philippines over 20 years.

"Many people in the Solomons have been blind from cataracts for 10 years simply because they haven't had the facilities, the doctors or the money," he said.

"They are led in by the hand one day and walk out on their own the next.

"To see that is the ultimate joy in my work and it's a privilege to be a part of it."

The Sydney University associate professor, who is based at Dalcross Private Hospital at Killara, described Australia as one of the luckiest countries.

"We are blessed to live here but so many people on our doorstep are less fortunate. It's our duty to help," he said. "Luckily I have a skill that is useful and easily transportable. It's your obligation to humanity to help where you can."

Prof Painter described himself as "just part of a team" and paid tribute to those whose support is critical to his work, including Dalcross, Foresight Australia, Open Heart International, his colleagues including head nurse Kerrie Legg and his family.

His wife Jenni, a nurse, and daughter Myfanwy, a doctor, have accompanied him on several trips, and his sons John, Christopher and Matthew have given invaluable support.

They all hosted a Solomons doctor, his wife and five children in 2000 when the doctor's training was interrupted by civil unrest.

"He would have been lost to ophthalmology. Helping was a community effort," Prof Painter said. "Soon there will be five eye surgeons in the Solomons. In some ways I have made myself redundant there."

Prof Painter said he had always wanted to be a doctor since he was a small boy.

"I wanted to do something with my hands and I liked fine, detailed things," he said. "You need steady hands to work in such minute areas."

He said advances enabled surgeons to do things now they could not do 20 years ago. "One hundred years ago you would only consider having cataracts removed if you were blind," he said. "Now we do it when you can't see your golf ball clearly."