

Dr Samantha Pillay, paving the way for many firsts

It was work experience, at the age of 15, in Cardiothoracic Surgery that cemented Dr Samantha Pillay on a surgical career path. Now she is a self-published author of *The No Recipe Cookbook* – a cookbook for people who don't cook.

Dr Pillay's journey over 35 years, from work experience to author, has been an interesting one. She was the first female to complete surgical training in adult Urology in South Australia. She further trained in female Urology – concentrating on women's incontinence – becoming the first urologist to exclusively sub-specialise in female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery.

As the first female section chair in South Australia for the Urological Society of Australia and New Zealand (USANZ), Dr Pillay served on both the National Board of the Continence Foundation of Australia and as their state chairperson from 2011 to 2013.

Born with congenital hip dysplasia, Dr Pillay started school in a wheelchair. "Surgery maybe wasn't an ideal career choice for someone who experienced pain on standing, but I was driven, stubborn and the harder it was, the more I wanted to do it," Dr Pillay said. "Urology had a lot of sit-down surgery and procedures under two hours. I had to be sensible about what speciality I chose and I enjoyed the endoscopic side," she added.

From 2007-2013 Dr Pillay served as chair of the Female Urology Special Advisory Group for USANZ. In 2007, she became the first female scientific chair for the USANZ Annual Scientific Meeting.

"It was a great honour to serve in these roles – to be the custodian and to

progress the area of female Urology. We grew the content of female Urology in the curriculum and at scientific meetings.

"This attracted surgeons into female Urology and grew recognition from our peers. There are now more women in Urology," Dr Pillay reported. "When I started my training, Professor Helen O'Connell AO was the only female urologist in Australia. Today that number has grown, although we are still far from a place where being a female in Urology, choosing a career in female Urology, or being a woman and not choosing a career in female Urology, are the norm," Dr Pillay said.

Bringing awareness has been a driving force in Dr Pillay's life, and she's carried this into healthy eating in *The No Recipe Cookbook*, which took her 18 months to write and recently reached number one in several Amazon categories. Taking on extra responsibilities at work and at home during the COVID-19 pandemic refined Dr Pillay's time-management skills and healthy meal planning.

Shopping once a fortnight saved her time and money, while also reducing her stress and food waste.

"At the end of the day I'm 'hangry' [hungry and angry] and I have decision-fatigue," Dr Pillay said of her own experience. "I don't want to choose from a menu or wait for a meal when I can have dinner on the table in under 20 minutes." There are no intimidating glossy pictures in her book. "I call it the 'anti-fancy' cooking movement," Dr Pillay said of this choice. "Cooking without a recipe allows me to be creative, take risks and embrace mistakes. Something I don't get to do when I'm operating." ■

