



TRACEY O'BRIEN

AUSTRALIA

Professor Tracey O'Brien is the Chief Cancer Officer of New South Wales, Australia and CEO of Cancer Institute NSW. An internationally respected clinician-researcher, Tracey is a paediatric oncologist and transplant physician with over 20 years of success propelling national and international excellence in research-led, patient-centred outcomes for children with cancer.

Tracey has co-authored over 120 research papers and several textbook chapters, leading to over 4,000 literature citations.

Tracey was the Director of the Kids Cancer Centre at Sydney Children's Hospital from 2016 to 2022, leading a team of 200+ clinical and research staff, and the Director of the Transplant and Cellular Therapy Program from 2004 to 2022.

Tracey is a strategic, collaborative, and inclusive leader and has held numerous high-profile leadership positions in cancer control, research and policy. These include Chair of the Cancer Australia Advisory, Vice-Advisory Chair (Asia, Africa, Australasia) for the Centre for International Bone Marrow Transplant Research, V/President; Australian and New Zealand Children's Oncology Group and board director Children's Cancer Research Institute.

In addition to her specialist medical training, Professor O'Brien has an MBA and Master of Law and dedicates significant time to training the next generation of clinician-researchers, mentoring over 35 paediatric oncology multidisciplinary clinicians and researchers.

**"You are not
here for the
dress
rehearsal."**

On Relationships that Influenced My Career

Throughout my career, there has not been a day when I have not learned something new. Remaining curious and hungry for knowledge is critical to innovation. My paediatric and adolescent patients and their families have been the most significant source of influence, inspiring me to solve the problems that matter most to patients.

I believe that excellence in medicine comes from great teamwork. As a leader, I always strive to ensure that all members of our paediatric cancer multidisciplinary teams are empowered and working to the highest scope of their practice.

Other key influences have been executive leaders in policy and government. Their mentorship has been invaluable in maturing my understanding of making large-scale sustainable change at the population level, particularly informing my interest and focus on better serving vulnerable and underserved populations to close the equity gap and provide excellence in outcomes for all people with cancer across the state.

On Challenges and Overcoming Them

I have certainly had times in my career when I have taken on more than I should have, leading to unnecessary stress on me and, likely, on others around me. I have actively worked on when to say NO, setting priority goals, mastering better delegation and not being a perfectionist – near enough is good enough.

On Balancing Career and Other Life Responsibilities

Working in paediatric cancer gives one an intimate and painful view of how fragile life can be and that, as a parent, the most important thing is the health and well-being of our children. In doing so, I hold this close and spend as much quality time with my kids as possible; being present in the moment is key. I treasure family holidays and always have one planned to look forward to, and I exercise and meditate – nearly every day.

Spending time with friends who don't work in healthcare is also something I consciously do and enjoy for that balance. The older I am and the more senior roles I have taken on, the more I appreciate the critical need for work/life balance to ensure that I perform at my best and how important it is for me as a leader to role model these behaviours for others.

My Words of Wisdom for the Next Generation of Female Leaders

Follow your passion. Reflect often – we are all leaders in evolution.

Lean in and grab opportunities with two hands as they arise.

Always operate just outside your comfort zone to maximize personal growth.

Don't do what you think you should do in terms of career progression if it doesn't feel like a natural fit; find what you are a natural at or can add value where others can't and learn from people in different sectors and industries.

Ask questions and, above all, be a great team player, build relationships and networks and be a great listener – having excellent soft skills will take your leadership journey further.