



The Association of Surgeons of South Africa

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Professor Bert Myburgh 1928 – 2010



It is with sadness that we heard about the passing of Professor Bert Myburgh on the 7th April 2010.

Johannes Albertus Myburgh (31st May 1928 to 7th April 2010) was born in Lindley in the Orange Free State. He matriculated from the Parys High School with distinctions in all subjects. He proceeded to the University of Cape Town on an Entrance Scholarship and graduated MBChB in 1950 with First Class Honours and Distinctions in all subjects other than Pathology. He received the Gold Medal for the most distinguished graduate of the year. While an undergraduate he played 1st XV rugby for the University of Cape Town and was Captain of the combined South African University Athletics Team. He was awarded his Springbok Colours for athletics in 1950.

After serving his internship at Groote Schuur Hospital he proceeded in 1952 to New College - Oxford, on a Rhodes scholarship. While in Oxford he worked initially as a senior house surgeon and later as a surgical registrar. He became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons (England) in 1955 and was admitted to the Specialist Register of the South African Medical and Dental Council in 1959 after having been a registrar in Surgery at Coronation and Johannesburg hospitals from 1956 to 1959. He was awarded the ChM from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1966.

Professor Myburgh was appointed Professor of Surgery (ad hominem) in 1967 and Head of the Department of Surgery in 1977. He held this position until his retirement from the Chair at the end of 1994. He was appointed as Emeritus Professor of Surgery in his old Department. During his seventeen years as Professor of Surgery he was awarded seven Honorary Fellowships, and Honorary MD, the Hans Snyckers Memorial Award, the Claude Harris Leon Foundation Award of Merit, Fellowship of the Royal Society of South Africa, the Inaugural South African Sims Traveling Professorship, and the South African Medical

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Research Council Silver Medal for Research. On his retirement he was awarded a Doctor of Science in medicine from the University of the Witwatersrand in recognition of his substantial contributions to the university and surgery in South Africa.

He was a Visiting Professor to twenty one different universities and was a member of ten different local and international professional societies. He was President of the College of Medicine of South Africa, President of the South Africa Association of Surgeons, President of the Southern African Transplantation Society as well as the Surgical Research Society. He was a Member of Council of the South African Medical Research Council and on the executive committee of a number of international surgical and transplantation bodies. He was on the editorial board of nine surgical journals. He served on numerous University of the Witwatersrand boards and Committees on the Committees of the Johannesburg Hospital.

Throughout his career, basic and applied research was his major passion. His clinical research interests included the aetiology of the common bile duct, the dumping syndrome after gastric surgery, iron deficiency after gastric surgery, wound sepsis, the effects of gastric freezing, and diverticular disease of the colon, portal hypertension, pancreatic cysts, and strictures of the bile ducts. However, his major contribution in the international field was in the area of organ transplantation. A major focus of this work was conducted on laboratory animals and in patients undergoing kidney transplantation which was in the area of immunological monitoring before and after transplantation. In addition, he delineated the role of pre-transplantation total lymphoid irradiation in the induction of immune tolerance and was in the forefront of research into renal xenotransplantation. If this became practical in man it would revolutionize clinical transplantation, which is limited by a shortage of human donor organs.

Professor Myburgh's organ transplantation research was recognized by the establishment of a Medical Research Council Unit under his directorship and eleven members of the Transplantation Research Unit received higher degrees by thesis, one ChM, three PhD's, and seven MScs. In addition Professor Myburgh has published more than 180 scientific articles in local and international peer review journals. He also delivered a number of named lectures, gave numerous presentations at local and international scientific congresses, and was an invited chairman at many of these congresses.

Professor Myburgh contributed immensely to the University of the Witwatersrand and its Medical Faculty, and the Department of Surgery, and Johannesburg Hospital. He taught generations of undergraduate and postgraduate students and this contribution was recognised by a Special Teaching Prize awarded to him by his Faculty in 1995. His research achievements were widely recognised and brought singular honour to the University of the Witwatersrand and the Department of Surgery. As Professor Emeritus and Honorary Professorial Research Fellow he remained active in the Department.

During his retirement he was elected Honorary Life Vice President of the Association of Surgeons of South Africa (ASSA). He was active on the Health Professions Council of South Africa and served as a member and later as chairman of one of the disciplinary Committee for many years until shortly before his death.

Bert married Teddy in December 1956 and they had three children John, Jacqui, and Sandy. They were undoubtedly the apple of his eye and he often expressed his pride in their many remarkable achievements. He was devastated when Teddy died at a young age in 1988 from a malignancy. In the years that followed he met Marie-Louise and subsequently married

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her in 1993. Marie-Louise has been staunch supporter of Bert and was a great support particularly when his health started failing in the last three years.

Bert died peacefully after a short time in hospital which was brought on by a fall.

Our condolences go to his wife Marie-Louise, John, Jacqui, Sandy, their spouses and children. Bert was undoubtedly an icon and will be remembered in the South African surgical and international transplant community as an outstanding clinician and respected researcher and above all for his extraordinary intellect.

Professor Sats Pillay (President)
Professor Martin Veller (Chairman).

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