

OBITUARY

Dr Ramquar Ramasar, 23 September 1918 - 24 August 2018



Dr Ramquar Ramasar, who qualified in medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1946, died on 24 August 2018, a month short of his 100th birthday. He was a second-generation Indian South African, a descendant of the indentured labourers recruited to work on the sugar plantations of the then Natal colony, and was raised in Umzinto, a small town on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal.

He matriculated at Sastri College in Durban, the first Indian high school in the country, in 1938 and then studied towards a BSc degree at the South African Native College in Fort Hare. Before completing the degree, he was accepted to study medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand. Upon qualifying he was unable to obtain a position to do an internship in a provincial hospital on account of his race. Dr A Gray, a family practitioner in Umzinto, took the newly qualified Ramasar under his wing to enable him to gain experience. This 'internship', though unpaid, was gratefully accepted. Ramasar then opened his own practice in

Umzinto and served the indigent population on the sugar estates there and on the broader south coast until 1961. His gentle manner, skill and compassion endeared him to the local community, and he earned the respect of all. Like many rural general practitioners of the era, he was multiskilled and performed minor surgical procedures, delivered babies and even extracted teeth.

During this time, two young doctors joined him for short periods to gain experience. They were Dr Narain Govender of Umzinto, and Dr Krishna Somers of Durban, who would go on to become an eminent cardiologist and retire as Professor of Cardiology at the Royal Perth Hospital in Western Australia.

Dr Ramasar relocated to Durban in 1962 and worked at King Edward, Clairwood and R K Khan hospitals. His engagement with the Natal Provincial Administration over a salary dispute led to him and other colleagues being dismissed and reappointed to junior positions, forfeiting all benefits accrued.

Dr Ramasar served his community in many ways. He was active in religious and cultural organisations. In his professional capacity he served as honorary medical advisor to the Natal Blind and Deaf Society and the Friends of the Sick Association, an organisation dedicated to the care of patients with tuberculosis. He was also president of the Umzinto and Districts Indian Child Welfare Society, and provided voluntary service to the Clayton Gardens Home for the Aged and the David Landau Community Centre.

In the 1970s, at the request of Mr C D Molapo, then Minister of Health of Lesotho, Dr Ramasar and a colleague, Dr S H Thaker, reorganised the Department of Medicine and the dispensary of Queen

Elizabeth Hospital in Maseru. This task was undertaken voluntarily during their vacation leave.

Dr Ramasar retired from R K Khan Hospital in 1983. However, his professional career was far from over. He was approached by a friend who had graduated with him at St Mary's Hospital. His 6-month stint was extended, and he ran the diabetes and hypertension clinics at St Mary's from 1984 to 1998. He then joined a group of family practitioners as a locum and worked well into his nineties.

Dr Ramasar was a life member of the South African Medical Association. He recalled that at the first ever medical association meeting that he attended, he, having sat in the front row, was advised during a break that he could not do so, and that he had to have his tea in a separate room on account of his race. He received the Dr K M Seedat Fellowship Award for long and dedicated service from the South African Academy of Family Physicians in 1996.

Dr Ramasar married Pramda (nee Sobrun), an academic and a social worker with a PhD in sociology, in 1952. She too was active in community life, and in her retirement served as president of the Chatsworth Hospice. He is survived by Pramda, two sons, Nawal Kishore and Yudhamanyu, and four grandchildren.

C N Pillay

Retired specialist surgeon and past president of the Natal Coastal Branch of the Medical Association of South Africa, Durban, South Africa

Pramda Ramasar

Durban, South Africa