

OBITUARY

Maurice Silbert, 21 October 1930 - 5 December 2018



Maurice Silbert was born in Paarl to immigrant parents, attended the Paarl Gymnasium, and in 1954 graduated MB ChB at UCT. After internship at Grey's Hospital and some locums he entered family practice in 1959. In 1963 he partnered with Sid Kiel, a relationship 'sealed with a handshake and a couple of Scotches' that became a long and much-admired collaboration.

Maurice was one of the doyens of family practice in Cape Town and was well known for his astute diagnostic skills and warm humanistic approach to caring for many thousands of patients over a 60-year era of advances in medicine that radically changed

healthcare. The values and qualities that characterised his work and his life included sincerity, integrity, humility, compassion, empathy, courage, fortitude and a sense of humour, all combined with dedication to excellence and a passion for developing and understanding human relationships and their role in health and disease. His special interests were the doctor-patient relationship, medical and psychosocial problems in the elderly, the family doctor's role in caring for the terminally ill, and the need to recognise the manifestations of 'masked depression', on which topics he wrote thoughtful articles. He was a founding member of St Luke's Hospice and the Cape Jewish Seniors' Association.

Maurice was one of a small cadre of dedicated family doctors who willingly took on part-time teaching and clinical work at the University of Cape Town medical school during an era when there was close interaction between doctors in the academic hospitals and those in private practice. He was active in the promotion of general practice as a discipline within the undergraduate curriculum, and played a significant role in developing family practice as a specialty. Many UCT medical students had the pleasure and privilege of rotating through his practice, where they witnessed and were inspired by care very different from what they were exposed to in the hospital environment.

His insights from personal experience of illness impacted on his practice of medicine,

and his equanimity will long be remembered with respect, admiration and affection. He often quoted Sir William Osler, saying, 'The good physician treats the disease: the great physician treats the patient who has the disease.'

His awards included the 1968 Louis Leipoldt Medal from the *South African Medical Journal*, the 1983 Hans Snyckers Memorial Medal for Dedicated and Distinguished Service in Medicine in South Africa, and a Distinguished Family Practitioner Medal from the UCT/Groote Schuur Hospital Department of Medicine, for consistent long-standing commitment to family practice teaching.

Maurice was a devoted family man, and his wife Marlene provided him with love and dedicated support. In turn he was strongly supportive of her educational work. Their mutual activities had a political perspective, in keeping with their strong social conscience. They nurtured a close and loving family with whom they spent much quality time, and of whom they were justifiably proud.

His death leaves a void for all who knew and loved him as a family member, dedicated colleague and friend. He is survived by Marlene, their daughters Jo, Beth and Patti and their families.

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