

# OBITUARY

**Frank Dieter Snyckers, 10 June 1940 - 23 December 2018**



Frank Snyckers, a neurosurgeon in Johannesburg, South Africa (SA), passed away in December 2018. As the doyen of neurosurgery in SA, he set an exemplary standard of excellence and a high-water mark for his colleagues.

Frank was born in Germany in 1940 during World War II. He therefore suffered the deprivation that was the destiny of civilian populations in countries directly affected by the armed conflict. He recalled that his family very often went hungry. They survived by picking mushrooms and collecting cigarette butts to barter for food. He, his mother and brothers lived on a farm outside Hamburg, which improved their lot.

In 1953, the family moved to SA and settled in Pretoria. After completing his primary school education in Germany, Frank enrolled at the Afrikaans Hoër Seunskool and was forcefully introduced to both Afrikaans and English. He adapted, and after matriculating he spent a year in the SA Navy

before enrolling as a medical student at the University of Pretoria.

Frank graduated MB ChB in 1964, followed by a year as a houseman and a further year as a senior houseman at Pretoria General Hospital.

At that stage he knew he wanted to study neurosurgery. He worked as a medical officer in the South Rand Hospital before joining the neurosurgery department of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Johannesburg as a registrar in 1968. After a 3-month stint in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1970, he obtained the FRCS (Edin).

After completing his neurosurgical rotation, he spent 1972 in Canada and Switzerland, accompanied by his young family. The first 9 months was spent in London, Ontario, at the University of Western Ontario, with the famous Dr Charles Drake. The last 3 months of the year was spent in Zurich, Switzerland, with Prof. Gazi Yasargil. This exposed him to the forefront of neurosurgical development in the world.

Frank then returned to SA to enter private practice in Johannesburg, initially in partnership with Dr Edwin Rosenberg. He still held part-time appointments at Wits for a number of years, but his main focus was his private practice, first at the Princess Nursing Home, and in 1991, when it closed, at Milpark Hospital.

There he ran a very large neurosurgical practice, including trauma cases, until he retired from clinical practice. He was involved in all aspects of neurosurgery, i.e. cranial and spinal procedures. Frank remained up to date with all the latest neurosurgical and spinal research and developments. His work ethic, as well as the volume of work that he could perform in a day, was astounding. He was tireless in the care of his patients, working late into the evening on most days of the week.

In spite of the heavy workload, he was always at the forefront of neurosurgery, learning new techniques and new approaches. This kept him up to date on an academic level.

Frank retired from surgical practice in 2013 and devoted the last years of his active life to writing medico-legal reports, which he had always enjoyed doing. He also became involved in the SA Medico-Legal Association and was one of its directors.

Frank served the Neurosurgical Association of SA as president for the term 2004 - 2006. He also served as president of the congress committee, arranging the congress of the SA Spine Society in May 2009.

Outside of his medical interests, he served, at various times, as chairman of the school board of Helpmekaar Hoër Seunskool and the Professional Provident Society from 1990 to 1994. With his German background, he actively participated in the activities of the SA Foundation and served on the German committee of the foundation. He also served as a federal councillor of the South African Medical Association.

During his years of practice at Milpark Hospital, his wife, Ria, actively helped as office manager and supported him in all his activities. She provided the restful home to which he could retire after a long day at work.

During the last months of his life, his health started to deteriorate, and he passed away on 23 December 2018.

Frank is survived by his wife, Ria, and 3 sons, 2 of whom, Hans and Christian, are orthopaedic surgeons; Frank jun. is an advocate. We extend our condolences to the family and salute a caring and dedicated colleague.

**Jos van Niekerk**

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