

OBITUARY

Emeritus Professor Sean Sellars, 1 November 1936 - 21 June 2019



Sean Sellars, Emeritus Professor at the University of Cape Town, died on 21 June 2019 at the age of 82 in Cape Town, after a brief illness. He came from a medical family and always wanted to be a doctor. His schooling as a boarder from the age of 8 years at the Gilling Castle and Ampleforth schools in Yorkshire, England, which were run by Benedictine monks, was hard and uncompromising, and helped to shape his person and future career. He commenced his undergraduate medical education at Cambridge University on a scholarship and completed it at St Mary's Hospital, London. He then held several appointments

in London and Oxford, including a spell teaching anatomy and physiology. His postgraduate training in otolaryngology (ENT) at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in the Oxford region was completed in 1968. At school, at university and beyond, Sean was a champion boxer and enjoyed playing rugby.

In 1969 he and his family moved to Cape Town, where he obtained an appointment in the ENT Department of the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Groote Schuur Hospital. He was appointed head of ENT in 1976 and as the first Leon Goldman Professor, an endowed chair, in 1981, holding this position until his retirement in 2001. He was extremely self-disciplined, was unsparing towards himself, and set high academic and clinical standards. He had a very practical, down-to-earth clinical approach, ran a very tight ship, and was unforgiving of poor patient care. He built the department into an internationally recognised unit and made important contributions to ENT. His many publications show that he worked closely with colleagues in other disciplines such as surgery, neurosurgery and oncology. Perhaps his most important contributions were in deafness, where he and Prof. Peter Beighton, head of Medical Genetics, co-authored many papers and improved the lot of hearing-impaired children.

Sean also contributed significantly through numerous university and hospital committees, societies, associations and clubs such as the Medical Association of South Africa, the Colleges of Medicine and national and international ENT groups, often as chairman or president. He was a founding member of the Pan African Federation of Otolaryngology Societies and provided specialist training at UCT for ENT surgeons from several sub-Saharan African countries. He was often invited to be a keynote speaker and received many awards including overseas Fellowships.

After retiring from UCT, Sean continued teaching, clinical work, painting and hiking, variously in Cape Town and in Ireland, for many years. He was active until his sudden heart attack.

Sean and his wife Rosemary had tragically lost their previous spouses while their children were young. They had just on 30 wonderful years together, shared important values, and as strong-willed individuals complemented each other marvellously. Sean is mourned by his wife, his children Maria and Christian, his step-children Chantal, Berene, Janita and Jason, and 16 grandchildren, who he loved and was proud of.

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