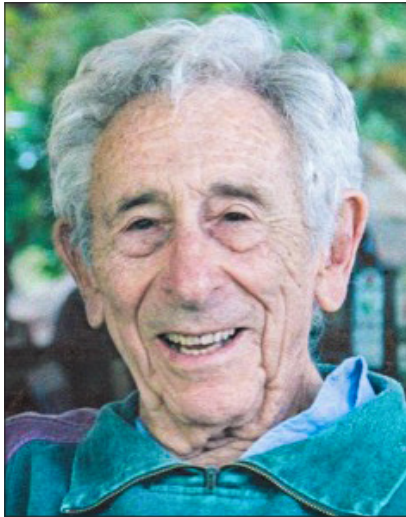


OBITUARY

Lynn Sinclair Gillis, 1924 - 2020



Lynn Gillis was a pioneering figure in South African psychiatry. Born in Kroonstad in the Orange Free State, he matriculated from Houghton College in Johannesburg and interrupted his medical studies at Wits University to enlist as a medical assistant in the South African Medical Corps, serving in makeshift hospitals in North Africa and Italy, finally graduating in 1948. He served registrar time at Tara Hospital and at the Maudsley Hospital in London before being appointed as senior psychiatrist and neurologist at Tara Hospital.

In 1962 Lynn was recruited to the University of Cape Town and Groote Schuur Hospital as the first Consultant and Head, in charge of nine beds. The first three registrars and the first clinical psychologist were appointed in 1963 and 1964. From this small cohort, Lynn set about creating services, teaching and research.

Lynn was one of the first proponents of community psychiatry and task-sharing; under his guidance a number of community clinics were set up, with leadership by nurses. His emphasis on community psychiatry included a focus on advocacy for mental

health, aiming to diminish stigmatisation. Courageously defying apartheid segregation, he integrated staff across wards. Over time, the department established services at Valkenberg and Alexandra hospitals, a division of child and adolescent psychiatry at Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, geriatric psychiatric inpatient services, and outpatient services in the community for people with alcohol dependence.

Lynn was a thoughtful and inspiring mentor to his students. He created a strong curriculum, with extensive study of human behaviour in the preclinical years and employment of his textbook of psychiatry for the clinical years. Over the years he grew the number of registrars and senior registrars, establishing one of the leading training programmes on the continent. Those who studied under him recall his formal lectures, and his informal advice, with tremendous fondness and gratitude. His singularly trusting style of leadership fostered personal initiative, a point that is also emphasised by successful mentees around the world.

By 1968, Lynn had also initiated an epidemiological study on the prevalence of mental disorder and alcoholism. That year he initiated the first Medical Research Council Unit in psychiatry; this undertook a number of further studies, and provided research mentorship to several individuals who went on to establish successful research careers. In collaboration with Prof. Julian Leff of the UK Medical Research Council, for example, Lynn studied the social precipitants of relapse in schizophrenia, finding massive discrepancies in the lived experience of individuals from different population groups.

Lynn held many positions of responsibility during his career, including President of the South African National Council for Mental Health, President of the Society of Psychiatrists of South Africa, President of the South African Geriatric Society, and Chair of the National Research Programme

on Aging of the South African population at the Human Sciences Research Council. He was a founding member and later Fellow of the College of Psychiatrists of South Africa.

Lynn served as Head of the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health at UCT for 27 years, retiring in 1989. The clinical, teaching, research and social responsiveness strengths of the existing department are in no small measure due to Lynn's pioneering work. His contributions were acknowledged with several awards, including the SALUS Medal (silver) for Meritorious Service to Medicine (1989) and a Merit Award for Outstanding Services from the Medical Association of South Africa (1990).

During Lynn's retirement he was able to pursue his interests in sculpture. One of his pieces, depicting the multidisciplinary team, can be seen in the foyer of Valkenberg Hospital. An enthusiastic mountaineer, he remained remarkably healthy and agile until his last years. His daughter Susan passed away in 2012 and Shirley (née Lurie), his wife of 64 years, passed away in 2015. He leaves a daughter (Jennifer), four grandchildren (Josh, Gabrielle, Jason and Danielle) and three great-grandchildren (Nomi, Yael and Lev).

Lynn was a wonderfully warm man, who positively influenced the lives of many colleagues, students and patients. He was a true 'mensch'; a man of integrity, and a man who always had a kind word for everyone. He will be sorely missed.

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