

Professor Mario Altini

19 September 1949 – 10 February 2017

It is with profound sadness that I bid farewell to my mentor, colleague and very dear friend, Professor Mario Altini. It is not easy to say goodbye to the inspiring, well respected, and righteous gentleman and exceptionally devoted Oral Pathologist that I had come to know over the last 22 years.

Mario Altini graduated as a dentist (BDS, 1973) and specialist Oral Pathologist (MDent, 1977) at WITS. Under the tutelage of the late Professor Mervyn Shear, he rose to become Acting Head and Honorary Professor of the Department of Oral Pathology in 1984, and full time Head in 1990. He held the post through to his official retirement due to ill health in 2011. He was world renowned and was recognised internationally by the International Association of Oral Pathology with the distinction of an Honorary Life Membership. He was awarded an FC Path (SA) in 2004. Professor Altini was a Councillor of the International Association of Oral Pathologists, President of the South African Society of Oral Pathology and Microbiology, Executive member of the South Africa Society of Forensic Dentistry and Honorary Consultant in Forensic Dentistry with the Department of Health.



Professor Mario Altini receiving his Doctorate

Mario Altini had an exceptional career as a dentist, which began in Braamfontein in 1973 and continued in Glendower until 2012. He was an outstanding, gentle and popular dentist whilst remaining uniquely passionate to his chosen field of Oral Pathology. Mario was an excellent teacher, with a willingness to share all that he knew. He taught his students with compassion and enthusiasm, captivating his audience of budding dentists and future specialists in all dental fields, and inspiring many to follow him into the discipline.

In 2002, Mario was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, which although overwhelming at times, he bore unflinchingly and with dignity. This affliction did not diminish his colossal spirit. His incredible and significant scientific contribution to Oral Pathology was recognised by WITS awarding him the most illustrious degree, DSc (Medicine) entitled "From Odontomes to AIDS" in 2013 for his lifetime's research journey. Professor Mario Altini's remarkable academic body of work lists more than 115 scientific publications, chapters in books, and extensive postgraduate supervision and examination. His influence on the field was immense with specialists trained in his Department moving on to hold senior positions in this and other institutions of higher learning, nationally and internationally.

Over his many years in Oral Pathology, Mario always held a special relationship with the Department of Anatomical Pathology, which continued to develop with Oral Pathology registrars spending dedicated time in Anatomical Pathology as part of their post-graduate training requirements.

Following his early retirement from the Department of Oral Pathology, he returned to the academic environment in May 2013 as the Research co-ordinator and Honorary Professor and then Visiting Professor in the Department of Anatomical Pathology, readily imparting his wealth of knowledge and depth of experience that he had acquired over the years.

We can reminisce about a man with exceptional intellect and influence, yet humble, principled, kind and generous. His caring showed no bounds, that even in his last days in hospital, he showed more concern about my health and well-being than his own.

Mario's passion extended beyond pathology. He enjoyed spending time with his family and friends, family vacations, playing golf, theatre, art films and watching sport. He took great pride in his family; his wife, Gail, daughter Jennifer, sons Gareth, Nicholas and David, daughters in law, Shirleen, Dana and Megan and his six grandchildren. We extend our heartfelt condolences to you. We take comfort that although too brief, we celebrate a worthy life. His legacy lives on in so many indefinable ways.

We will always remember Prof Altini as a knowledgeable professional with an enviable reputation, a great teacher, colleague and friend.

Thank you, Prof. You will be sorely missed.

Shabnum Meer (Oral Pathology, WITS)