



## Claire Penn: Speech-language pathologist, teacher, supervisor, researcher and mentor (1951–2018)

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**HOW TO CITE:**  
Watermeyer J. Claire Penn: Speech-language pathologist, teacher, supervisor, researcher and mentor (1951–2018). *S Afr J Sci.* 2018;114(9/10), Art. #a0283, 1 page. <https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2018/a0283>

**PUBLISHED:**  
11 September 2018

Professor Emeritus Claire Penn passed away peacefully on 21 July 2018 after a long illness. Claire dedicated a significant portion of her life – 44 years – to the University of the Witwatersrand. She received her degree in logopaedics (speech and hearing therapy) cum laude in 1972.

Claire held the endowed chair of Speech Pathology and Audiology and was Director of the Health Communication Research Unit in the School of Human and Community Development at Wits University. She was the first A-rated scientist in the Faculty of Humanities. She had a strong international profile, served on the editorial board of a number of international journals, was a member of several international speech pathology organisations, and regularly delivered international invited keynote addresses. Claire published over 100 papers in local and international peer-reviewed scientific journals, 25 chapters and 4 books (including an extensive multi-volume dictionary on southern African signs).

Claire was instrumental in the development of the field of health communication in South Africa. The merging of her lines of research afforded a rich and mutually beneficial interface with societal impact and recognition. Her research strongly suggested the need for an expanded role for the profession of speech-language therapy, both in national and international contexts. Her work also consistently demonstrated the major contribution that South African research findings and methods and insights have to offer the global forum.

Claire was a recipient of a number of awards, including the Order of Mapungubwe (Silver) in 2007, for her 'excellent contribution to the field of speech and language pathology, especially in the area of linguistics, sign language, child language, aphasia and head injury and producing ground-breaking research in understanding the complexities of human communication'. She was the winner of the Science & Technology category of the Shoprite/Checkers SABC2 Woman of the Year award in 2008 and the Department of Science and Technology Distinguished Woman Scientist award (academic excellence in Social Sciences or Humanities) in 2010. Claire was a member of the Academy of Science of South Africa.

Claire had a brilliant and curious mind; she had tremendous vision and a gift for seeing the big picture. She was ahead of her time in many ways – teaching contextually relevant ways of doing therapy and research right from the start of her career. Claire set high academic standards for herself and others. She built strong academic ties both locally and internationally. She broke through glass ceilings and fought for the place of women in academia. She was a fierce defender of ethical principles and patients' rights, especially those patients marginalised by communication disorders and language barriers. She taught her students to be advocates and activists. Claire was never more at home than when sitting in a clinic somewhere in a rural setting, doing ethnography under a tree and interviewing patients, genuinely interested in improving their quality of life and care.

Claire will be remembered as an outstanding teacher, supervisor, researcher and mentor. She had great vision for the profession and she has inspired generations of speech therapists and audiologists. Many of those who were taught and mentored by Claire have gone on to become research and clinical leaders, both locally and internationally.

Claire is survived by her partner, Martin Templer, and son, Adam Penn-Nicholson.



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