

Edward J Immelman

Emeritus Professor Ed Immelman (1938 - 2013) died in Cape Town on 10 January 2013 after a short illness. He is survived by his wife Trish, sons Robert and Grant, 5 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren.

Ed came to UCT as a medical student in 1955 after matriculating at Rondebosch Boys' High School. His academic ability was recognised early, with the award of the McCulloch scholarship for the best student in the third year and later the Aaron Behrman scholarship for the best student in the fourth year. In his final year, he was awarded the Dowie Dunn Memorial prize for the best student in paediatrics. He completed his MB ChB with distinctions in both the first and third professional examinations and was awarded his degree with honours. Ed was set on a career in surgery and, after his internship under Professors Jannie Louw and Frank Foreman, he began with a year in the JS Marais Laboratory where his supervisors were Chris Barnard and Bob Frater. His clinical surgical training culminated in his passing the FCS (SA) in 1966 at the age of 28.

In 1967 he was appointed lecturer and Honorary Senior Registrar at the University of Bristol, supported by the UCT Baron Hartley scholarship. Over the next 3 years, he gained excellent clinical research, teaching and administrative experience. He was particularly involved in research investigating a new model for heterotopic liver transplants in the pig.

On returning to Groote Schuur in 1970, he was appointed Senior Surgeon and Senior Lecturer on Dr Jack Hesselson's firm, and subsequently Dr Helmi Madden's firm. When Dr Madden retired in 1980, Ed became head of the firm. He had been appointed Associate Professor in 1976, and in 1981 was appointed the second full Chair of Surgery.

Ed retired from active surgical practice at the end of 2000 but continued to teach at Groote Schuur Hospital until the end of 2005, largely at the request of the students.

As a surgeon, Ed was particularly talented and meticulous. He was always at the forefront of developments in vascular surgery. He was a founding member of the Vascular Society of Southern Africa (VASSA) and served as its President from 1993 to 1995. In 2011, VASSA bestowed on him a distinguished service award.

He was a very productive academic. While still an intern at Red Cross Children's Hospital, he recognised for the first time acute bone marrow fat necrosis associated with traumatic pancreatic ascites presenting in a child, a condition which mimics osteomyelitis, which resulted in an ongoing study of the long bones of patients with chronic pancreatitis, demonstrating a high incidence of associated long bone infarcts.

He published nearly 200 articles and abstracts in peer-reviewed journals and was the author of many chapters in books. His work included one of the most important trials of thrombolysis for deep vein thrombosis in conjunction with Mike Elliott and Peter Jeffery. In addition to his own research, he supervised 8 masters and doctorate theses.

With great foresight, he re-created the non-invasive vascular laboratory in 1975. This had first been started by Professor Robert Goetz 40 years before but had ceased to function after his departure to the United States in 1958. An active research-orientated vascular lab ensured that from this time on he was increasingly involved in vascular surgery at Groote Schuur, and he provided a superb training for surgeons specialising in vascular surgery, many of whom have made their mark there and around the world.

It is as a great teacher that Ed will most fondly be remembered. He probably taught more than 8 000 medical students during his career: In the 1970s, he was responsible with Ralph Kirsch for the introduction of the 'new curriculum' based on the block system. He was voted Teacher of the Year by the final year classes in 1997, 1998 and 1999, and in 1989 received the highly prestigious Distinguished Teacher Award from UCT.

Ed Immelman will be remembered fondly by all those who worked with him over the years. He had an extraordinary ability to be everyone's friend and mentor without loss of respect. His clinical acumen, surgical skill and teaching ability were legendary. All those who worked on his firm over the years always went the extra mile, never because of fear of the system but because of respect for the man. For all of us taught by him over the years, it was indeed a rare privilege.

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