

Professor Lynne Wilford Baker 28.06.1928 - 10.02.2017



Lynne Baker was born in Potchefstroom on the 28th June 1928. His high school education was at Jeppe Boys' High School in Johannesburg and he then went to the University of the Witwatersrand, where he qualified with an MB, ChB in 1951. Following this he returned to Potchefstroom and worked as a General Practitioner. He decided to do surgery and began his surgical training at Aberdeen University under Prof Hugh Dudley and Prof George Mavor, one of the pioneers in the management of venous disease and arterial surgery which became major interests of Lynne's. He completed his Royal College Fellowship in Edinburgh in 1958 and proceeded to McGill University in Montreal, Canada where he completed a Master of Science degree.

In 1967, he returned with his young family to South Africa where he was appointed Head of Department and Professor of Surgery at the University of Natal. He was in charge of surgical services based at the King Edward VIII hospital which was chronically underfunded and consisted of a collection of dilapidated old buildings. The core building had been completed in the 1930's and was the only institution in the world named after King Edward VIII prior to his abdication. The expansion of the hospital was achieved by building wood and iron huts behind the core building and these served as wards which are still in use today.

Lynne's aim was to improve conditions at the hospital and to develop a first rate Department of Surgery. He was an immensely hard worker, always first to arrive and last to leave the Medical School every day. He set about recruiting individuals who would help him in his mission to expand and develop academic surgery in Natal. His philosophy evolved from the history of the New York Mets, a baseball team, which had always languished at the bottom of the championship log. An astute manager had recruited various players who had not quite made the grade in various major league teams and gave them the opportunity to develop, and built them into a force that eventually won the World Series. His major strength, when recruiting staff, was to allow them to develop in their own right and to facilitate this development. He engendered enormous loyalty among those whom he had recruited and many stayed the course over the years and made major contributions to clinical surgery, both in South Africa and abroad.

He fought to expand the Department and persuaded the authorities to create independent departments, notably paediatric surgery, urology and ENT with full professorships. He was also enthusiastic about developing surgical intensive care units with their own specialised staff. The reputation of the Department grew with the team he developed. He enthusiastically interacted with other departments and the private sector, involving them in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching as well as extending an open invitation to departmental teaching meetings. The Department became a significant member of the surgical fraternity within South Africa and abroad, making contributions to local, national and international academic meetings. One of the highlights of his international career was delivering the Semmelweis Lecture on "Lessons from lavage and colonic trauma" at the Surgical Infection Society of Europe congress in Vienna in 1994. His many academic achievements culminated in his election as a Fellow of the University of Natal.

He held senior leadership roles in the College of Medicine of South Africa and in various societies including the Surgical Research Society, Trauma Society as well as the Association of Surgeons of South Africa. He introduced the Advanced Trauma Life Support concept into South Africa and poured his energy into making it an integral part of undergraduate as well as postgraduate student training. He was also instrumental in organising and running courses in ATLS. Lynne was an inveterate traveler and took regular sabbaticals overseas making many friends within the international surgical community. Bearing testimony to this

is the photograph gallery in the corridors of the Department of Surgery in Durban, which was a veritable "who's who" of international surgery. He also facilitated and organised overseas training fellowships for departmental members including my fellowship in vascular surgery in San Francisco with the understanding that I would return and set up a vascular unit in Natal. In the operating theatre environment in a "show and tell" situation, he was a superb technical surgeon. His mantra was -"if it is not right it is wrong so do it again."

On a personal note, he had an informal and relaxed management style but was a stickler for discipline and in particular dress standards. Students were expected to dress properly and this, for some reason revolved around wearing a necktie. If one observed what the students were wearing, it was obvious that it had been passed down from generation to generation and many of these items were decaying and in dire need of cleaning. In his office he had a large coffee percolator in which he brewed what looked like old diesel oil and which you were expected to share with him in the morning before

starting the day's work. He had an open door policy until 8 o'clock in the morning, and on many occasions he stated that he built his department around this coffee percolator. One must, however, emphasize that the strength of the coffee was such that one needed to count the spoons after use to ensure that one had not dissolved. Lynne thoroughly enjoyed a party and every year the end of year function was held in his home and these were indeed memorable and somewhat 'riotous' occasions.

He leaves his wife of sixty years, Barbara, who has always been a loyal supporter of his endeavours, two children, Diane and Andrew, and three grandchildren. Life, however, can be unfair and it is sad that a man with such warmth, energy and zest for life should spend his last years living in a twilight world requiring constant care and attention. His passing in many ways was a merciful release for those who cared about him. May he rest in peace.

John V Robbs
Durban