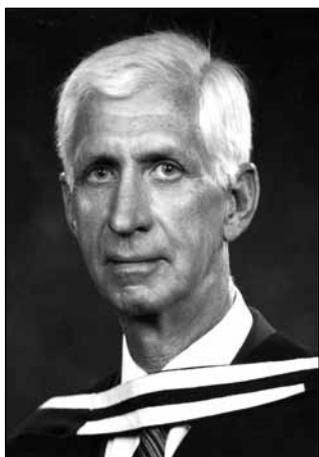


## IN MEMORIAM

## Walter Beck (1926 - 2011)



Professor Walter Beck, who died in August this year, was one of the pioneers of the specialty of cardiology in this country. Born in 1926, he was educated at Stellenbosch Boys High School and graduated BSc at Stellenbosch University in 1945. He subsequently completed his MSc, MB ChB, and MMed at UCT. After internship and registrar training at Groote Schuur Hospital he spent two years as a registrar in cardiology at the Brompton Hospital in London and was successful in the examination for the MRCP.

This was followed by a 2-year fellowship in physiology at the Mayo Clinic. He returned to join the Cardiac Clinic at UCT and Groote Schuur Hospital as a research bursar in 1959 and was appointed as a specialist physician and deputy director of the Cardiac Clinic in 1961. He was head of the Cardiac Clinic from 1972 until his retirement in 1986. He was elected to Fellowship of the American College of Cardiology in 1969 and the Royal College of Physicians in 1972.

Walter Beck was an outstanding clinician with superb skills and encyclopaedic knowledge, who revelled in the intellectual challenge of evaluating complex congenital and acquired heart disease using clinical examination coupled with the chest radiograph and ECG. He was one of the last master cardiologists completely comfortable with the evaluation of congenital and acquired heart disease. When he did make mistakes, which were infrequent, he would critically re-evaluate the reason for the error. He was a skilful and accomplished operator in the cardiac catheterisation laboratory and an expert in interpretation of haemodynamics, angiography, oxygen saturations and dye-dilution curves.

He made original observations and published extensively in the international literature in many areas of cardiology, including congenital heart disease, the evaluation and surgical correction of valvular heart disease, and cardiac physiology. He was closely involved with the pre- and post-operative evaluations of the first heart transplant recipients and the first descriptions of these in the literature.

He was a gifted teacher, both at the bedside and in the catheterisation laboratory, his ward rounds were popular and his elucidation of complex haemodynamic principles (literally on the back of a cigarette box) was legendary. His comprehensive knowledge of cardiology and cardiac physiology allowed him to render the most complex of issues readily understandable. He trained a generation of cardiologists, many of whom went on to distinguished careers in academic and private practice in South Africa and abroad.

Outside of medicine his interests were broad, including Cape Dutch furniture, Chinese ceramics, vintage cars, motor cycling and wind-surfing. Ever the teacher, he introduced his junior consultants to windsurfing.

Pat Commerford  
Elwyn Lloyd

## BOOK REVIEW

## AIDS, Sex and Culture: Global Politics and Survival in Southern Africa

By Ida Susser. Pp. 304. £62.50. Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken, NJ. 2009.  
ISBN: 9781405155861.

South African-born anthropologist, Ida Susser, re-visits her native land to examine the multifaceted cultural environment pertaining to the HIV pandemic. Gender subordination is at the heart of the book: the forces of globalised economies make women particularly vulnerable. Susser focuses her skills on this disadvantaged HIV-afflicted group. She seeks to explicate the nexus between the personal and the political, the powerful and the dispossessed, the macro-economic and the domestic, and exposes how HIV acts as a powerful palimpsest of the troubling divisions of global human interactions.

Susser casts her critical eye over the biomedical discourse surrounding HIV. She finds the disease to be framed, primarily, as an urban male homosexual problem, and that this population accrues disproportionate benefits. She demonstrates the concerted activism taken to raise awareness of the pandemic's effect on women, including: heterosexual transmissibility, mother-to-child transmission, and the central roles that women play as care-givers.

The market-driven policies, or 'Neoliberalism', come into condemnation; widely adopted and exported to developing countries by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, argues Susser, these powerful macro-economic factors foster gender subordination, and contribute directly to economic oppression of the poorest poor.

Susser traces negative consequences of international aid policies, such as George W. Bush's PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief): influenced by 'compassionate conservative' theologically driven ideologies that inscribe conditions on the provision of aid (e.g. emphasis on abstinence at the expense of sex education and condom provision). In contrast, Susser reveals that women's concerns prioritise frank discussion of sex education, sexual orientation, contraceptives and family planning.

At the heart of the book, contextualised by South African history and post-apartheid transition, are ethnographic descriptions of HIV-positive women trying to carve out hope during life's daily struggles; we see them congregating in groups, working with beads in a mission hospital in rural KwaZulu-Natal, or campaigning for female condoms in Namibia. We meet protagonists of 'transformative activism': 'the collective action that aims for change to the overall structural constraints that disempowered people confront in their day to day lives when fighting HIV.'

Included is a chapter by Sibongile Mkhize, a social scientist who writes of the profound and devastating effect that HIV has had on her family. This contributes to the thick-grained texture of the book, to paint a picture of flexibility and enterprise among ordinary women.

Susser describes a model of resilience amidst socioeconomic deprivation, gender discrimination and the wrong-headedness of HIV denialism and anti-scientism. In doing so, she recapitulates the same enterprising activism by her own academic efforts. She is vocal and persuasive, and though her own ideological slant can be a bit strident, it is an important part of HIV cumulative research and social literature. Accessible and compelling, this work is valuable to understanding HIV within the broader southern African and global context, and is highly recommended to anyone interested in the intricate interplay between the social and biological sciences.

Anthony Smith