Rene Denyssen le Roex

5 April 1927 – 25 June 2017

Rene le Roex, one of the first proponents of providing a comprehensive surgical service in Pietermaritzburg, died on 25 June 2017. He was born on 5 April 1927, the youngest of five children. After matriculating at Pretoria Boys' High School, he entered the University of Pretoria, qualifying MBChB in 1949 at the age of 22 years. Following an internship at Grey's Hospital, Pietermaritzburg, he spent the next six years in the surgical departments of firstly Grey's, and then at Edendale Hospital. In 1956 he moved to King Edward VIII Hospital in Durban to complete his surgical training in the Department of Surgery at the University of Natal, and was one of the first surgeons to qualify as a Fellow of the College of Surgeons of South Africa. After a spell as lecturer in Durban, he returned to Pietermaritzburg, initially as a specialist surgeon at Edendale Hospital, and then in 1963 as a solo surgeon in private practice.

Rene le Roex was the first of the new generation of surgeons who brought major vascular surgery, paediatric and neonatal surgery to Pietermaritzburg and the Natal Midlands. This meant that, with the exception of cardiac surgery and neurosurgery, a full surgical service was available without the necessity of referral to Durban or elsewhere. In 1968 Rene established a surgical partnership with Malcolm Bett McKenzie and me, and we were joined in 1976 by Phil Cohen. Apart from the private practice, this partnership also serviced Grey's, Edendale and Northdale Hospitals on a sessional basis throughout that time. This partnership continued successfully until 1988, when Rene "retired" from Pietermaritzburg.

On "retiring", Rene moved to Knysna, where he was appointed surgeon at the Knysna Provincial Hospital, and opened a private practice, the scope of which was limited by the lack of a specialist anaesthetic service. He finally retired from all surgical practice in 1997.

I first met Rene in January 1956 when I took my first wobbly steps in medicine as an intern in the Surgical Department at Edendale Hospital. The firm comprised a part-time Chief, Rene and me. Rene, at that stage, was already a very capable surgeon, clinically and technically. He was also a very fine leader, who guided, taught, encouraged, assisted and, when necessary, chided gently but firmly, and never unjustly. He stressed that the patient's best interests should always be central to a surgeon's philosophy of practice. His influence and mentorship turned my life around, and led me on the path that I was to follow over the next 43 years. Over the years these traits have similarly influenced numerous young doctors, and also caused him to be widely admired, respected and loved by colleagues, nursing staff, patients and their families.



The same leadership abilities also resulted in his playing a leading role in the Medical Association of South Africa (MASA), first as a member of the Natal Inland Branch Council for many years, including two terms as Branch President. He also served on the MASA Federal Council for several years, including as Chairman. During these years he represented MASA on several occasions on the Remuneration Commission as well as at the World Medical Association. He also represented the Natal Inland Branch on the Board of the Natal Medical Plan for several years. He was an active and influential member of the Pietermaritzburg Round Table, including a term as President, during the sixties, until he was "retired" at the age of 40, as is the practice in Round Table.

Rene was a devoted family man. In 1954 he married Ethne Simpson, a nurse at Grey's Hospital. Together they reared a happy family of two boys and two girls. They can be proud and grateful to have had them as their parents. Interests outside of medicine and the family included carpentry, social tennis and, after he moved to Knysna, golf. In his latter years, which he spent in Cape Town to be closer to family, he was also an avid reader, developing the habit of simultaneously reading serious literature, especially history and philosophy, and a lighter novel.

After a life of selfless service to others in so many ways, he died on 25 June 2017, just six weeks after the loss of Ethne, his loving wife of 63 years, survived by their four children, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Berti Hellberg