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A Festschrift in honour of Professor Solomon Benatar's contributions to medicine, academia and society

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Solomon ('Solly') Robert Benatar was born on 6 February 1942 in Selukwe, Southern Rhodesia (now Shurugwi, Zimbabwe). He matriculated from Prince Edward School in Salisbury (now Harare) and registered for his MB ChB at the University of Cape Town (UCT), graduating in 1965. He married Evelyn Mary Goldberg, and they had three children: David, Michael and Brian. Following a brief period as a general practitioner in Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha), he returned to Cape Town to train in anaesthetics, qualifying as a Fellow of the Faculty of Anaesthetists (FFA (SA)) in 1971. Thereafter, he trained in Internal Medicine at Groote Schuur Hospital and obtained Membership of the Royal Colleges of Physicians (MRCP (UK)) in 1972.

Following his training as a physician in Cape Town, he undertook a research fellowship in pulmonary physiology through the British Medical Research Council (British MRC) at Northwick Park Hospital in London. This was followed by a period as a research fellow and honorary registrar at the Royal Brompton Hospital and the Cardiothoracic Institute in London. He then returned to Cape Town to take up a consultant post in the Division of Pulmonology. This period was marked by prolific scholarly output, including numerous seminal publications that have influenced practice and have been widely cited, such as his publication on sarcoidosis in South Africa (SA), as well as important contributions on acute asthma and tuberculosis (TB).

In 1980, he was promoted ad hominem to Associate Professor at UCT. Shortly thereafter, he succeeded Dr Stuart Saunders as Professor of Medicine and the fifth Chair and Head of the Department of Medicine at UCT and Groote Schuur Hospital, a position he held from 1980 to 1999.

Prof. Benatar inherited a department that had been ravaged by an adverse political climate, an exodus of experienced clinicians and academics overseas – many also moving into the private sector – and frequent healthcare budget cuts. Despite these challenges, the Department of Medicine stabilised and flourished during his tenure. He left an indelible mark on the identity and character of this now 106-year-old department. His tenure is remembered for his bravery, moral fortitude and the support he provided to its members, as reflected in the words of the late Prof. Eric Bateman:

> 'He was a fearless leader and did not mind confronting wrong or simply poor decisions by both university and hospital leadership. I am sure this sometimes did not go down well, but he is so principled that he simply could not let things pass. I admired his bravery. He was also fiercely opposed to wrong. His weapon was clear thinking – in other words, logic – and an ability to express things clearly. This is also very clear in his writings, his letters to journals, newspapers, and the like, which were all well-reasoned and reasonable, yet direct. As a department, we could always depend on his working tirelessly on our behalf and at great cost. His contributions at faculty board meetings were always highly appropriate and a welcome relief. He generally saw issues much more clearly than his peers, yet he was supportive and thoughtful in relation to his staff. He would phone often to find out how the family was or when some event required comment and he felt support and encouragement were necessary.'

The late Prof. Patrick Commerford said this of Prof. Benatar's tenure:

> 'Solly took over a sadly weakened and very young department. But his enthusiasm, optimism, and support for all staff earned him our affection and, in turn, our support of him and his efforts. He asked for the extra mile and most of us were prepared to go that distance for him … When he retired, he left a department immeasurably larger and stronger than the one he took over.'

Prof. Benatar's leadership has always been characterised by his commitment to mentoring others. Generations of physicians across the world have regarded him as their mentor – some even without his awareness. Emeritus Prof. Janet Seggie, who regards him as her mentor, describes him as 'a down-to-earth individual who always treated others with respect and had much time to share with junior colleagues. This is how I and many of Solly's mentees remember him.'

While wearing the many hats of Head of Medicine – from overseeing clinical platforms and governance to teaching, mentoring, supervising, training and administration – he maintained a remarkable academic output, publishing over 300 articles before his retirement, and many more thereafter. After stepping down as Head of Medicine in 1999, he remained Chair of Medicine until his retirement in 2007, and has been an Emeritus Prof. of Medicine at UCT since 2008.

Prof. Benatar's interest in, and scholarly contributions to, the field of bioethics began in the 1980s. In 1984, he founded an informal multidisciplinary Bioethics Unit and, in 1992, the UCT Bioethics Centre was formally established within the Department of Medicine, of which he was founding Director until 2012. The Bioethics Centre has played a central role in establishing bioethics as a scholarly discipline in SA and has contributed significantly to international debates on potentially exploitative research practices during the early HIV era, helping to develop ideas later incorporated into the Declaration of Helsinki. The Centre also received Fogarty International Center funding for the International Research Ethics Network of Southern Africa (IRENSA) diploma course, which trained members of research ethics committees across the region.

Prof. Benatar has made major global contributions to bioethics and related fields, authoring numerous scholarly articles on bioethical issues in medical practice and the commercialisation of medicine,

the social determinants of health, research ethics, public health ethics, cross-cultural ethics, human rights and health, as well as global and planetary health. He co-authored two editions of *Global Health: Ethical Challenges* with Prof. Gillian Brock and contributed seminal commentaries on the future of medicine and healthcare in SA in a series of *New England Journal of Medicine* papers, the most recent co-authored with the late Prof. Bongani Mayosi in 2014. Prof. Benatar served as President of the International Association of Bioethics (2001 - 2003) and was an ethics adviser to Médecins Sans Frontières from 2001 to 2024. In addition, he co-authored papers on medical education that critically examine tensions in undergraduate pedagogy and the enduring disconnect between medical training and real-world clinical practice.

Between 2000 and 2007, he was an annual Visiting Professor in Medicine and Public Health Sciences at the University of Toronto. He was subsequently appointed Professor in the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto from 2008 to 2015, where he remains an Adjunct Professor. Between 2016 and 2018, he served as Distinguished Senior Scholar in Global Health Ethics and Public Health Policy, also at the University of Toronto.

In his role as Emeritus Prof. of Medicine at UCT since 2008, he has remained a key member of our department, consistently contributing his intellect and sharp wit to discussions on complex ethical matters. He has retained a keen interest in the department and its people, often reaching out to offer support and encouragement. His care, interest and moral support were particularly valued during the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated health service response. As a testament to his continued engagement, he delivered the Dr Stuart Saunders Lecture in 2019, entitled 'Health, Healthcare and Professionalism in the 21st Century' – a particularly fitting honour given that he succeeded Dr Saunders as Head of Medicine. He has made valued contributions to initiatives in the Western Cape public sector aimed at developing reasoned, fair, accountable and transparent approaches to the allocation of limited healthcare resources.

His academic achievements have been recognised through numerous honours, including Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians (1981); election as a Foreign Associate Member of the Institute of Medicine of the US National Academy of Sciences (1989); Honorary Fellowship of the American College of Physicians (1993); election as a Founder Member of the Academy of Science of South Africa (1994); Fellowship of UCT (1994); election as an Honorary Foreign Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1996); Fellowship of the Royal Society of South Africa (1997); and election as an Honorary Member of the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society in California (2002). In addition, he was awarded a DSc (Med) by UCT in 2007.

Among the many awards and prizes he has received are the Hans Snyckers Memorial Award, the University of Calgary Faculty of Law and Faculty of Medicine Award, the Golden Jubilee Award from the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa (CMSA), the Mayor of Cape Town's Medal, the Henry Knowles Beecher Award and the Global Forum for Bioethics Research Award.

Beyond his scholarly output and its recognition, Prof. Benatar stands out as a person and leader deeply committed to the wellbeing and health of all. He has applied his intellect and expertise to building institutions and strengthening healthcare systems, with the aim of advancing equitable, high-quality healthcare and addressing the inequality and injustice that drive disease and ill health in society. His deep, genuine care for colleagues and his dedication to excellence, integrity and hard work have made him a role model to generations in the healthcare field. As a department, we are deeply indebted to him for his leadership and immense contributions over many years, and we wish him continued good health.

In this Festschrift, the aim is to honour Prof. Benatar's wish that the emphasis should not be on him, but rather on the broad range of issues with which he has engaged over the course of his academic career, providing contemporary updates and reflections on how these fields have evolved. These contributions span the diagnosis of TB, the SA healthcare system, research ethics, HIV and human rights, the political economy of health, medical education and cross-cultural ethics. Additional tributes are included, as well as a manuscript reflecting on the work of the UCT Department of Medicine since 1980, the year in which Prof. Benatar was appointed Head of Department. We express our gratitude to all the authors who have contributed to this Festschrift, as well as to the *South African Medical Journal* for supporting and managing its publication.

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