

Obituary: Basil Jaffe



Basil Jaffe passed away on the 24th of September 2009. His loving wife and soul mate Norma and daughter Suzanne survive him. Notwithstanding all Basil's achievements he was first and foremost a family man. He was happiest relaxing with them at his holiday home in Betty's Bay. His love also included his extended

family of which I was privileged to be a member. He also was a great friend to a vast and varied circle of people and was intensely loyal – regarding that attribute as key to relationships.

His passing is an immeasurable loss to Medicine in general, and General/Family Practice specifically. For five decades he was centre stage in the battle to establish General Practice as an Academic Discipline in South Africa with its own body of knowledge and skills. He did this with passion, purpose, charm, sense of humour, warmth and diplomacy. The impetus for his mission was his belief that everyone was entitled to a personal and knowledgeable physician who was responsible for her and her family's comprehensive care. Everything he did in life had to have a social purpose. He channelled his endless energy into medicine after earlier being involved with radical politics. In so doing he inspired countless young doctors into the importance of General Practice, its intellectual challenge and the satisfaction one could attain by being a doctor that cared and provided life-long continuing care to patients and their families.

In this endeavour Basil achieved international as well as national recognition. In the early sixties he amalgamated the Cape Branch of the Faculty of General Practice with the Royal College of General Practitioners and towards the end of that decade, the Faculty of the General Practice joined the College of Medicine of South Africa. He then was Chairman, first of the Faculty of General Practice and later the Academy of Family Practice for almost the entire seventies and eighties. Thereafter he continued in lesser capacities on several medical committees and in 2000 he wrote a short history on Academic Family Practice in South Africa – 1958–2000. It had to be with satisfaction that he completed this latter task as he had co-authored, in 1974, "A Guide to the Content and Attitudes of General Practice".

From the early formative years of General Practice he established relationships with the world leaders of his discipline. As a result

there were visits to South Africa from the likes of Pat Byrne, the first President of the Royal College of General Practice, Ian McWhinney, who more than anyone defined the discipline, and other academics such as John Fry, John Stevens, Wess Fabb to name but a few. In 1975 at a World Organisation of Family Practice meeting held in Johannesburg he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal College of General Practice in recognition of his contribution to the discipline.

His South African colleagues also recognised his monumental contribution. He was elected as an Honorary Life member of the National GP Group of MASA in 1982 and the Academy of Family Practice in 1997. In 1997 he also received the UCT Distinguished Family Practitioner Medal and in 2007 he was elected a Fellow of the Faculty of Family Physicians of the College of Medicine. Posthumously the latter body have mooted the creation of a Basil Jaffe medal for Family Practice while the University of Cape Town Department of Family Practice are to name their seminar room after him.

Basil's activism for family practice did not exist in a vacuum. He was in fulltime practice for nearly 50 years in the Cape. He was tremendously popular with his patients, becoming a legend in the area. He practised what he preached and provided services from "the cradle to the grave" including an extraordinary load of obstetrics. While he always was honest in his interactions with patients, never hesitating to say, "I don't know", he nevertheless, exuded confidence and provided comfort.

Basil's other major activity, in pursuing his passion for Family Practice, was medical education. He fought a life long battle to have Family Practice become an integral part of the medical curriculum at the University of Cape Town. He taught whenever he was given the opportunity and for several years he was a lecturer and preceptor to students.

Basil was forever the optimist and his enthusiasm never abated. If he attended a particularly successful CME meeting where the body of knowledge of General Practice had been advanced, for example, he would declare, "This has been a major triumph for General Practice". However he never sought the limelight. In response to flattery he maintained that he had never sought greatness and if he had attained that it had been thrust upon him.

It is fair to say that Basil lived his life to the full. His parting will leave a vacuum in many peoples' lives as well as in the practice and advancement of Medicine. Our deepest sympathies go out to his wife and daughter.

Joseph Levenstein