

## Rural doctor of the year 2007



The Pierre Jaques Award for the 2007 rural doctor of the year was presented to Dr Gert Marincowitz at the Rural Health conference in Badplaas on 23 August 2007. The award is presented to a rural doctor, working at the coal face. The person is judged by the RuDASA Committee to have made a significant contribution towards rural health. The award is a RuDASA initiative in cooperation with the South African Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care and the South African Medical Association.

Gert Marincowitz has worked in the Tzaneen area for the past 16 years where he is committed to the public health primary care clinics. Being fluent in the Tsonga language, he is known as 'the white shangaan doctor' in the Mogudeni Grace Health Centre where he never misses his weekly day of consultations.

Gert is the driving force behind the start of Antiretroviral Treatment in this clinic; it is the first and only primary care site providing ART in the public health system in Limpopo. Within six months of its opening, 500 patients have received treatment in this very remote site.

Of even more importance, is the way in which this ART clinic came into existence. Faithful to his belief that the participation of patients in their own healthcare is an important healing factor, he has worked on a principle of shared decision making from the start and included all stakeholders in founding the ART clinic. From 2004 onward, PLWHA, nurses, community care givers, lay counsellors and managers had regular meetings to discuss the best possible care for people living with HIV. The PLWHA were chosen as representatives from an active support group of more than 70 people. The on-site training of nurses, and the development of clinic guidelines and other tools were all parts of what has become a model for developing and implementing a Wellness and ART program at the primary care level.

The bottom-up approach contributes to commitment and a feeling of ownership among all stakeholders. This approach has proven crucial for sustainability and this is how Gert has helped to transform Mogudeni Grace's ART site into a well-oiled machine.

As a leader who modestly follows, Gert is an example for public health primary care.

The award was named after Dr Pierre Jaques, a founder-member of RuDASA and a doyen of rural practice in South Africa. Dr Jaques spent most of his working life at Elim Hospital in rural Limpopo and has been a tireless advocate for rural health and the role of the rural doctor in South Africa. He passed away two weeks before the conference, and will be fondly remembered by many rural health workers.

Rudasa conference, 23 August 2007

## Obituary PIERRE JAQUES



Pierre Henri Jaques (1928 – 2007), the son of Swiss missionaries, was born at Elim Hospital in the then Northern Transvaal. Both his grandparents had been Swiss missionaries in the area. He later married his childhood friend, Rachel Bertrand-Jaques, also the daughter of missionaries.

After obtaining his matric at King Edward School in Johannesburg, he went on to study medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand, from which he graduated in 1952. Despite contracting polio while in his first year at university, which left him significantly disabled, he fought his way back from being in a wheelchair to using crutches and finally to being able to

walk unaided, albeit with the characteristic limp many people remember him by.

The next few years saw him studying surgery in the United Kingdom before returning to Elim hospital to take up the post of Medical Officer. He took over as Superintendent from his uncle and mentor, Dr Jean Rosset, in 1964 and remained as Senior Superintendent and Senior Specialist in Family Medicine until his retirement in 1993. His stay at Elim spanned the years of transition from Mission Hospital to Homeland Hospital falling under Gazankulu, to Rural Hospital under the Limpopo Provincial Department of Health. These were often challenging years complicated by staff shortages, limited budgets and bureaucratic changes. The doctors who were recruited mainly from Europe at the time still speak very highly of their experiences at Elim under his tuition. The hospital grew to be the largest facility north of Pretoria, encompassing a 660 bed hospital with specialist ophthalmic services, a nurses training college and 22 district clinics. The system of 'community care groups' was initiated during his stay – this system has now gained world wide acceptance as a method of extending health care in rural communities.

Besides his hospital duties, Pierre also served as family practitioner to many families in the area. He would often point proudly to people in the community and say 'that's one of my babies!' His passion was Family Medicine; he furthered his studies on a part time basis and obtained a Masters Degree in Family Medicine (M.Med.Dom) from the University of Pretoria. He also obtained Diplomas in Public Health (DPH) and in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (DTM & H) from the University of the Witwatersrand.

Pierre was an active member of Round Table and Rotary in Louis Trichardt for many years and served as Chairman and President on each of these committees respectively. He also sat on a number of committees involved with the promotion of rural health and the training and deployment of appropriately trained health workers in South Africa. Many Wits medical students over the years passed through Elim Hospital under his mentorship, and he argued strongly for more recognition and better training for rural doctors.

In his post-retirement years, much of his energy was invested in teaching and examining students and doctors at Wits University and Medunsa, as well as for the HPCSA, and in the publication of numerous articles. He served for a time as Manager of the Journal of SA Family Practice. He presented papers and lectures at International Congresses and Universities in Hong Kong, Israel, Switzerland and Canada.

Pierre was a tireless advocate for rural health and the role of the rural doctor in South Africa. He was a mentor and role model for many doctors in South Africa and beyond. His care and concern, as well as his sense of humour and enthusiasm, will long be remembered.

Pierre passed away peacefully on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August at his home in the company of family. He is survived by Rachel, his children Vivianne, Nadine and Colette, and 8 grandchildren.

The 'Pierre Jaques Award' for the Rural Doctor of the Year was established in 2002 by the Rural Doctors' Association of Southern Africa (RuDASA). The award is given annually to a rural doctor, working at the coal face, who is judged by the RuDASA Committee to have made a significant contribution towards rural health in the previous year. It is fitting that the award will now continue to honour the memory of a great South African rural doctor.

*Vivianne Jaques and Ian Couper*