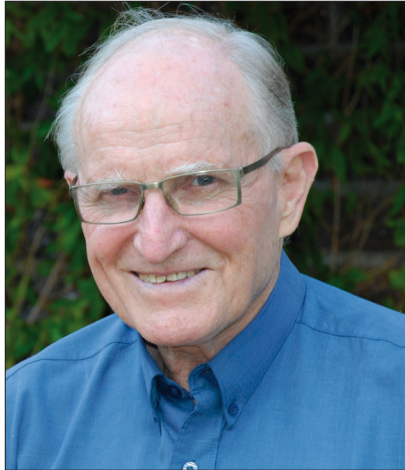


# OBITUARY

## Prof. JP van Niekerk (1936 - 2025)



Prof. Johannes Philipus de V van Niekerk, popularly known among his friends and colleagues as JP, died suddenly as a result of complications following an emergency heart operation in Cape Town. He was 89 years old. JP was a highly respected and fondly regarded human being for his wisdom, generosity, humanity and leadership skills, both within the medical profession and the community at large.

JP van Niekerk was born in Cape Town in 1936. Because his father was an officer of the Land Bank, the family was frequently relocated, and JP received his primary and secondary education at eight different

schools in various locations in South Africa. He then entered the University of Cape Town medical school, graduating MB ChB in 1959. He was, in later years, appointed the well-loved Dean of UCT's Faculty of Medicine (now the Faculty of Health Sciences) and, later, the director of the UCT Postgraduate Medical Centre.

After completing a year of internship at Groote Schuur Hospital, JP accepted an appointment as medical officer looking after the mining community at the Ernest Oppenheimer Hospital in Welkom. He always considered his 5 years in Welkom to have had a hugely influential impact on his professional career. Here, he did a great deal of traumatic and other surgery, became proficient at anaesthetics and learned about tropical diseases and other conditions specific to mining. His clinical experiences in Welkom aroused JP's interest in research, leading to a number of research projects. One such clinical condition common among the miners was infected hands, which JP identified as a significant factor in work-time loss on the mines. His research showed that much of what was taught on the subject at that time was incorrect, and that there were many still-unanswered questions. His research on this condition culminated in his award of the degree of MD.

JP undertook further training in radiology at Groote Schuur Hospital, leading to his

MMed (Radiology) (UCT) degree, and the qualification of Fellow of the Royal College of Radiologists.

JP was an active member of the South African Medical Association (SAMA) from its inception, and served the association in many guises, most notably as managing editor of the *South African Medical Journal*, helping the journal to navigate a period of financial vulnerability. He started three new journals, including the *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law*. He was President of SAMA in 2006 - 2007 and, over the years, served on various SAMA committees too numerous to list. He also left a mark on many other professional bodies, such as the Health Professions Council of South Africa, the Colleges of Medicine, the World Health Organization and the World Federation for Medical Education. He was closely involved in several community care organisations, among them the Hospice Palliative Care Association of South Africa.

JP van Niekerk's sudden departure has stunned his friends and colleagues. But his legacy lives on among those who knew him and those who were touched by him.

### **Dan J Ncayiyana**

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