

Obituary – Emeritus Professor Ralph Kirsh

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Emeritus Professor Ralph Kirsh. His illness was borne with dignity and characteristic optimism, and he passed away at home, surrounded by his close family.

Prof Kirsh's association with UCT spanned 50 years, from his registration as a medical student to his retirement from the position of Professor and Head of the Department of Medicine in 2005. During this time, he played a huge role in the Faculty leadership, and among his many activities, headed the MRC Liver Research Centre, served as acting dean, and also served on many UCT committees. His contributions to the Faculty and the University and his academic brilliance were widely recognised, and he was recipient of the UCT Distinguished Teachers Award, the University Fellowship and a Doctorate in Science (D Sc) in Medicine.

Thousands of medical students, registrars, scientists and clinicians were taught and mentored by him, and his own research produced numerous publications, including almost 500 papers, books and chapters.

Professor Kirsh also made significant contributions to the advancement of academic medicine and health care in the country, and among his many honours were the award of the bronze and silver medals of the South African Medical Association, the Department of Health Excellence Award and the South Africa Medal (Gold) by the Southern Africa Association for the Advancement of Science, for his "exceptional contribution to the advancement of science". He has served as President of the Colleges of Medicine of South



Africa, the South African Association for Medical Education, the South African Gastroenterological Society, the African Association for the Study of the Liver, and the Medical Association of South Africa. On the international front, he held honorary fellowships from Colleges of Physicians in Glasgow, Australasia, Pakistan, London, Ireland, America, and West Africa, and he was a member of the American Association for the Study of Liver Disease, and the Council of the International Association for the Study of the Liver.

Since his retirement, he continued to serve the University as Member of the University Council, in which role he also represented the Council on the University Research Committee. Nationally, he also served the Health Professions Council of South Africa, the South African Medical Journal, the Colleges of Medicine, and at the time of his death, was President of the South African Medical Association.

Ralph Kirsh was a brilliant and caring doctor, scientist, teacher and mentor to many. He was leader in academic medicine, health care and scientific endeavour in South Africa and beyond, and his wisdom and leadership will be sadly missed.

As we grieve with his wife, Beverley, his sons, David, Richard and Derick, we thank them for sharing Ralph with so many, and wish them long life.

Marian Jacobs

Professor and Dean, Health Science Faculty,
University of Cape Town