

The Department of Surgery, University of Limpopo (Medunsa Campus)

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The Medical University of Southern Africa (Medunsa), as it was formerly known, came into being in 1978 following an Act of Parliament that motivated for the establishment of a medical university to rectify the dire underrepresentation of the black community in the South African health system. The main aim was therefore to train black doctors, dentists, veterinarians and allied health professionals who would be able to meet the demands of the South African health system; at the time over 90% of medical personnel (at least as far as doctors and specialists were concerned) were white.

The University was built in a mountainous landscape, approximately 31 km from the Pretoria central business district and bordering on the North West Province, formerly known as Bophutatswana. Ga-Rankuwa Hospital, now known as Dr George Mukhari Hospital, situated in the Ga-Rankuwa township, was the University's first teaching hospital.

The hospital was established in 1973 as a district hospital before being converted to an academic hospital in 1978. It had 39 wards and over 2 000 beds, and was the second largest hospital in South Africa.

The past

The Department of General Surgery was composed of all surgical subspecialties. Professor O. E. Hansen was the first Head of Department, with Professor L. Blumberg appointed as an associate professor in 1978.

There were 5 surgical wards, 2 female, 2 male and 1 paediatric ward. The 4 adult surgical wards were then

subdivided into 5 firms (Monday to Friday firm). Each firm had 1 or 2 consultants with a registrar and a medical officer. The Department was involved in both undergraduate and postgraduate training, carried out in the form of lectures and bedside teaching.

Research formed an integral part of the Department's activity and a number of publications appeared in the *South African Medical Journal* relating to thyroid disease in blacks and increased incidence of duodenal ulcers in blacks by professors Hansen and Blumberg respectively. In 1982, however, the associated surgical disciplines broke away from General Surgery.

In 1984 the Renal Transplant Unit was established under the leadership of Professor Bauling and by the end of 1985, 19 kidney transplants had been performed. Professor Grant became head of Paediatric Surgery in 1985. In 1986, Professor Van Wyk, who had been in the Department for the past 4 years, became the head of the Department of General Surgery.

The Department grew and by the mid 1980s the Breast Unit/Clinic had been established by Professor Blumberg. The Unit dealt mainly with pre- and postoperative management and follow-up of patients with breast carcinoma.

The middle years

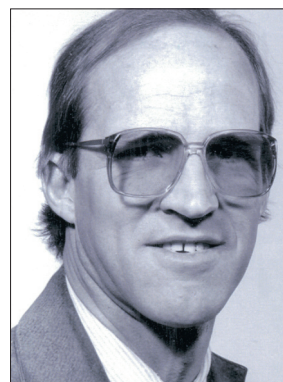
Towards the end of 1991, Professor Van Wyk left the Department to take up a post as head of Department at the University of Stellenbosch. Meanwhile Professor Mtshali,



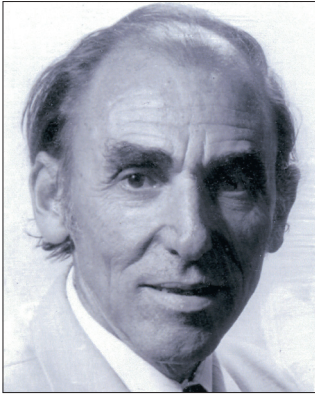
Professor O. E. Hansen –
the first Head of Surgery.



Professor J. A. L. van
Wyk – the second Head of
Surgery.



Associate Professor P. C.
Bauling.



Associate Professor L. Blumberg.

who at the time was an associate professor, assumed position as acting Head of Department. Professor M. C. M. Modiba later became the Head of Department in September 1992.

The Department grew and the Thyroid Clinic took the form of discussions on patients with thyroid problems and suggestions on management. The Department of Surgery also established and headed other interdisciplinary meetings

with the surgical specialties. The institution managed a full spectrum of general surgical conditions including vascular and hepato-pancreatico-biliary diseases.

Dr Shelley took over the Breast Clinic from Professor Blumberg. The Clinic grew but because the hospital did not have its own radiotherapy unit, patients had to be sent to the nearby Pretoria Academic Hospital, at the time known as H. F. Verwoerd Hospital, for radiotherapy. The clinic is currently run by Dr Mundawarara.

Dr L. Marcisz took over from Professor Grant and became the head of the Department of Paediatric Surgery in 1996. In the mid 1990s laparoscopic surgery was introduced to the Department and was received with great enthusiasm. Dr F. Ghoor was one of the first surgeons to spearhead laparoscopic surgery in the Department.

The present

Training

The training at Medunsa is unique in many respects. The number of students is quite large in comparative terms and the students are mostly from educationally disadvantaged communities. The Department of Surgery's undergraduate programme also involves the teaching of third-year dental students. The medical students are introduced to surgery from the third year and the training continues up to the sixth year. The current class of 2005 has 300 students. Since its inception the Department has conferred 2 927 M.B. Ch.B. degrees.

Postgraduate training is also vibrant. The Department offers a postgraduate programme for the M.Med. degree and registrars are encouraged to be active in surgical research. Registrars have an option of obtaining the F.C.S. diploma from the College of Medicine of South Africa. Twenty-nine M.Med. degrees and 19 F.C.S. diplomas have been conferred. A number of articles have been published by the registrars in several journals.¹⁻¹¹

A Laparoscopic Unit is currently being developed and in this regard every effort is being made to establish the required infrastructure.



Professor M. C. M. Modiba – the third and current Head of Surgery.

The future

As part of a nationwide restructuring of institutions of higher learning, Medunsa amalgamated with the University of the North, and is now known as the University of Limpopo. The medical school has remained in its original location although it is now part of a bigger institution.

The Department has acquired 2 satellite hospitals, Polokwane (previously known as Pietersburg) and Mankweng

hospitals, both situated in the Northern Province. This has increased the Department's patient pool immensely, plus it is the referral institution for Rustenburg, Brits, Odi and Jubilee hospitals. The Department is in the process of acquiring Rustenburg Hospital as a satellite teaching hospital.

Finally, in comparative terms the Department of General Surgery at the University of Limpopo Medunsa campus is one of the younger Departments in the country and despite the resource constraints and other limitations imposed by circumstances of the pre-1994 era, it has acquitted itself very well in serving the previously marginalised communities, be it in the form of training or service delivery.

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