



## HENDRIK HANEKOM — INNOVATOR, FACILITATOR AND TRANSFORMER

Dr Hendrik Hanekom joined the Medical Association of South Africa as deputy Secretary-General in 1987. In 1990 he was appointed Chief Executive and Secretary-General, a post which he held until the end of August 1999 when he left the association to become Executive Chairman of Health Advantage, a new lifestyle management company for health professionals.

At the time of Hanekom's appointment MASA was grappling unsuccessfully with political forces which had torn the medical profession apart. Now, just over a decade later, he has left a united association representing all of the previously disparate groups of South African doctors. It is worth recording Hanekom's role in this transition.

During the 1980s MASA was increasingly criticised both at home and abroad for its failure to denounce the human rights abuses which pervaded every aspect of South African society at that time. The death of Mr Steve Biko and the disclosures of Dr Wendy Orr had incensed many doctors, but their criticism was dismissed by MASA as being 'part of a well planned and co-ordinated attack aimed not so much at the Medical Association of South Africa or against our health services as against our country itself'.<sup>1</sup> Soon after joining the staff of the association Hanekom was sent on a study tour which included a visit to the German Medical Association. Here, while attending a meeting of the German Medical Assembly, he was confronted with the dramatic unfurling of a huge banner attacking MASA and his presence at the meeting. Hanekom recalls being deeply shocked by this attack on the association to which he was so fiercely loyal.

However, where others might have retreated into a laager, Hendrik examined the reasons behind the criticism, found many to be valid and proceeded to work tirelessly to transform MASA. A month later he was part of a small group which persuaded the Federal Council of MASA to accept unanimously a statement calling for the '... abolition of all discriminatory measures in South Africa to ensure the disappearance of the practice of apartheid, so that the human dignity of all people be acknowledged, affording them equal and just opportunities'.

Hanekom pursued the professionalisation of the organisation with equal vigour. In 1989 he organised the first of a series of strategic planning meetings which allowed the association to clarify and record its mission, to develop a series of short- and

long-term goals and to develop the strategies required to meet these.

In 1990 MASA hosted a summit on the future of academic medicine. This meeting established the concept of academic complexes which stretched beyond the confines of the tertiary academic hospitals and recognised the importance of teaching students in primary, secondary and tertiary care facilities. Although the profession was still largely fragmented, Hanekom managed to bring together a large group of health professionals representing all shades of medicopolitical and political opinion.

Soon after Hanekom's appointment as Secretary-General he created health policy, professional affairs, law and ethics and finance directorates within MASA. These complemented the standing committees of Federal Council. 1990 also witnessed the association's first attempts at achieving unity when Hanekom met with Dr Aslam Dasoo, who was then representing SAHWCO. This was followed in 1991 by a series of meetings between MASA, NAMDA, SAHWCO and other groups which resulted in the formation of SAMA in 1998. Unity became a reality when the NMA joined SAMA in May 1999.

Hanekom also played a major role in the formation of JUDASA and SEHDASA. He strengthened the support base for the full-time doctors' group and was instrumental in securing their representation in the bargaining chamber.

Managing a professional association with 14 000 members is not an easy task. The successful introduction of new structures and strategies, with the inevitable changes in representation which follow, required considerable managerial skills as well as vision. These Hendrik Hanekom has in abundance. Managing an association during a period of significant sociopolitical change requires additional skills, and above all unquestionable integrity. The successful transition from MASA to SAMA has been in no small measure a reflection of the skill, dedication and total integrity of Hendrik Hanekom.

**R E Kirsch**

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1. Ncayiyana D. The unpublished letters on Steve Biko. *S Afr Med J* 1997; 87: 719.



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