

OBITUARY

Dr Mahomed H Amla, 1 September 1949 - 31 December 2020



Dr Mahomed H Amla (fondly known as Baboo) passed away after a protracted battle with cancer on 31 December 2020, a day short of his 71st birthday. Baboo matriculated at Sastri College in Durban in 1968 and then studied towards a BSc degree at the University of Durban-Westville. He was one of three first-year BSc students who accomplished the 'big four' (botany, zoology, chemistry and physics), and was accepted to study medicine at the University of KwaZulu-Natal before completing his science degree. We qualified together in medicine at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 1974.

Our friendship began as classmates in high school, from standard seven at Sastri College in Durban. I can still remember Baboo sitting with his brother Cassim in the second to last row in the four years at Sastri College, his quiet but jovial attitude already evident. We rekindled our friendship when he was admitted into the second year of clinical medicine, and then our friendship grew closer because of the pressures of studying detailed anatomy and physiology in the old curriculum. We spent many hours studying together at each other's homes, and graduated together in 1975.

After his internship Baboo started work as a locum GP under the late Dr Rajmahomed, who he subsequently joined in a full and perfect partnership that endured for many years until Dr Rajmohamed passed away in 2008. Baboo served as a dedicated general practitioner in the town of Tongaat for some fifty years, until 2019 when he fell ill. Like many GPs who practise away from the large cities, he was multiskilled and performed many surgical procedures in his rooms, delivered babies and extracted teeth. His gentle manner, humility and compassion endeared him to the local community, and he earned the respect of all. He served his community in many ways, including being active in NGOs and in religious and cultural organisations.

After graduation we often visited each other, and Baboo would often call to say he was five minutes away and would like to pop in for a cuppa. He would captivate us with his unique brand of piquant humour, and when he visited, the house was full of laughter with everyone in stitches. One of my personal recollections of our early training was when one of our new interns was struggling to insert a trochar through a very tiny intercostal incision in the chest of a patient with a pneumothorax. Baboo went to the oxygen cylinder, removed the mallet and offered it to the young intern, who almost fainted at the thought of using a mallet on the trochar to gain access into the chest cavity. We never grew tired of listening to his raconteuring. During these times I got a clear insight into the life of a GP and the varied roles he was called upon to play, and we would chat about the interesting cases that are so unique to general practice, and so different from the insular environment of state practice.

Although Baboo retired from general practice in 2019, his professional practice was far from over. He focused on the technique of circumcision which he perfected and popularised, carried out

in the doctor's room using the relatively simple, bloodless technique of necrosing the foreskin with the penile ring. He was instrumental in adapting and popularising this procedure, which avoided admission to hospital and a general anaesthetic. During his illness he developed COVID infection, recovered from it, and continued with circumcisions using his daughter (Dr Mariam Amla)'s rooms. His initiative and skill in this procedure gained national acceptance and he was consulted by families from across the country, with queues of mothers waiting outside his daughter's rooms with their children to consult him. He did not let his illness get him down in any way, always being active and on the move, and never failing to visit for a welcome chat which I so looked forward to.

Baboo grew up in a close-knit family of eight children. He leaves three children, Ahmed, Mahomed and Mariam, who have all grown in their own fields. Ahmed is in business, Mahomed distinguished himself as a South African batsman and international cricketer of repute, and his daughter Mariam is in general practice. Among his interests and his general knowledge was his love of carpentry. I can still picture him in his shed, finishing off the cupboards for his home. Baboo will be remembered by his colleagues and peers as a true gentleman, generous and always ready to accept and seek advice. Anyone who met him will remember him for his cheerful and inquiring mind and his love for playing on words.

Baboo was a true friend and an invaluable colleague. The impact of this loss on his family is huge and difficult to fathom. Our thoughts are with them.

Datshana Naidoo

*Department of Cardiology,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban,
South Africa
naidood@ukzn.ac.za*