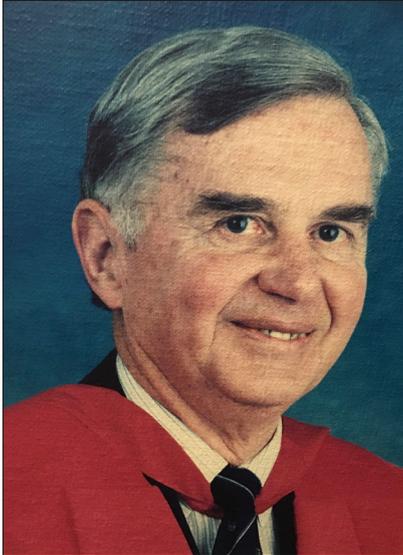


Prof. Atties Malan, the first neonatologist on the African continent: A tribute on his 90th birthday



To the Editor: I would never have endured a period of training in the USA if it hadn't been for Atties, who had preceded me there. He was my elder brother, my mentor, and taught me the basics of survival in a strange environment, like how to buy, prepare and cook a meal! He saved me from floundering, until I was joined by my wife and family. When the time came for him to return to Cape Town, the departmental chairman pleaded with him to stay, offering generous incentives, which he declined. His response was 'I was put on the tip of Africa for a reason, which I must now fulfil.' And that he certainly achieved! With the help of Prof. Boet Heese he established the first neonatal unit on the continent at Groote Schuur Hospital, and ran it with the utmost professional skill. It was the most sought-after

department for specialist training in the Division of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of Cape Town. His protégés achieved numerous doctorates and went on to provide incomparable care to newborn infants throughout this and other countries.

A shy man of deep faith, Atties has never sought the limelight, and did not receive the accolades or promotions that he deserved for his clinical and organisational skills and his achievements in research. His work on acid-base balance, treatment of hyaline membrane disease, and surfactant production in premature babies was absolutely groundbreaking. Each day he would make a list of 'to do' undertakings and was certain to have completed them before heading home. His attention to detail was and is meticulous and he was more than generous with his time, especially to parents and all grades of hospital staff. All this went back to an earlier age when his school, Rondebosch Boys High, recognised his skills as a leader, and made him head boy.

Atties delights in telling humorous stories of people and incidents he has encountered. On one occasion he was wheeling a sheep to the laboratory, through the bowels of Vanderbilt Hospital. 'Say, what's that?' asked a passing nurse. He told her. 'Well I never!' was her response. She was from New York City, and had not seen a real live sheep – ever!

Atties relishes visits from his four sons and their families, Remy and Andrew in the USA, Christian in Johannesburg and Andre in the UK. He ensures that there will be a trip to the family house in Little Brak, an essential excursion for their enjoyment. Fishing is an absolute requirement and is conducted with an enormously long bamboo rod, with no attachments other than a line fixed to the top end! I do not recall how successful it is, but the day always ends with a braai, which is one of his great delights. He adores his wife Hester, and we thank her for the love she showers on him in their retirement.

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