

Prof Eric U Rosen

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A consultant for all seasons

On the 12th of May, 1989 Prof Eric Uriah Rosen (he detested his middle name and hardly ever declared what the middle initial stood for) delivered his inaugural lecture titled “A consultant for all seasons – the South African Paediatrician”. Prof Rosen was indeed a paediatrician for all seasons. Trained in a time when a good clinical examination, sound clinical judgement and a bit of gut feeling were the most important tools of the trade, he was a consummate clinician. He was indeed one of the last of a dying breed of brilliant general paediatricians who had a breath-taking scope of knowledge and experience of the vast field of children and their ailments, from the common to the exotic, from the simple to the complex.

Yet, even as a “generalist” – and I do not use the term lightly – he did pursue some ‘sub-speciality’ interests throughout his active clinical years. First it was pulmonology, especially the field of asthma. Then when the HIV/AIDS crisis started, he became an expert in this field, initiating treatment in the early days of the epidemic, when treatments and outcomes were still very uncertain, especially in the paediatric population. His last, and probably his most enduring and significant field of interest was developmental paediatrics.

In this field he made a significant contribution, after he had been appointed head of the department of paediatrics and child health at Coronation Hospital (now the Rahima Moosa Mother and Child Hospital). During his time there he still played an active part in general paediatrics, but under his leadership the outpatient department was strengthened and extended, especially to include and develop clinics to address developmental issues in neonates and children. In general Prof Rosen’s legacy was always to teach and train, not only the registrars at the hospitals where he worked, but in the developmental clinics it was also his willingness to train and teach medical officers which ensured a significant contribution to developmental paediatrics, not only at Coronation Hospital, but the whole of the Witwatersrand. He also became a respected member of the Paediatric Development and Neurology Association of South Africa (PANDA-SA), of which he remained an active member long after retirement. In fact Prof Rosen was active in this field long after retirement, not only at Coronation Hospital, but also assisted at the unit run by the late Prof

Lorna Jacklin at the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital for many years.

Prof Rosen will be remembered for his “get the job done” attitude. During his term as head of the paediatric department, the department had to move to JG Strydom Hospital (now Helen Joseph Hospital) due to the political agendas of the day, and later again back to Coronation Hospital. Prof Rosen took all this in his stride and the department was able to make the transitions without a hitch under his leadership.

But, Prof Rosen will always be remembered and respected as a significant teacher and role model to all who worked, studied and qualified under his watch. He always had an enquiring mind, which translated to an impressive number of publications. His enthusiasm for always helping children was contagious and his joy when he was able to solve a complex clinical conundrum was infectious. He inspired so many who worked with him to be the best professionals they could be. His contribution to the field of paediatric care, both locally and internationally, should never be underestimated.

On a personal level Prof Rosen was a fascinating man with a compelling personality. The fact that he also held a BMus degree assured that he also had an impressive knowledge of classical music and he was a staunch supporter of the arts. He also became a significant collector of local visual art. He had an excellent eye when it came to spotting upcoming significant local talent and possessed many early works of artists that found fame, both locally and internationally. He was also a connoisseur when it came to food, and meals and parties at his house were always events to look forward to. He was very social, a loyal friend and never prejudiced.

Prof Rosen unapologetically shared his life with his partner, Ron Bartholomew, for many decades. This was at a time when this lifestyle was still much closeted, and certainly was not the cultural and political beacon it has become lately. He paved the way for minority groups in the department and always made them feel welcome and cherished. In fact, Prof Rosen was also very vocal about racism all his life, and never hesitated to point out discrimination of any kind.

To quote the last sentence of his inaugural lecture: “The paediatricians’ spring, that season of renewal and hope, is the growth of interest in the new morbidity with a chance to improve the quality of life (present and future) for

many of the children of the land.” This especially is true in these challenging times and certainly as true today as it was when written more than thirty years ago. May we as paediatricians always experience this spring of renewal as we address new challenges in child health to improve the quality of life of the paediatric patients we serve, and as we do this, may we always remember Prof Rosen who was such an example to us all. Prof Rosen will be sorely missed by colleagues and friends, but his impact on the wellbeing of children will remain with us all.