

OUR
HERO

PROFESSOR BONGANI MAYOSI

(28 JANUARY 1967 – 27 JULY 2018)

Samantha Page remembers the life of a researcher, role model, scientist and a brilliant human being



A national treasure

Professor Bongani Mayosi was one of South Africa's brightest stars. He was a cardiologist, researcher, mentor, educator and, at the time of his untimely death in July this year, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town. His professional and academic achievements are too many to list, but it's safe to say that Professor Mayosi's body of work is impressive and inspiring. It is worth highlighting that his professional achievements include being awarded the Order of Mapungubwe (Silver) in 2009 and an A-rating by the National Research Foundation.

Scientist par excellence

As a researcher and scientist, he was known for his rigour and tenacity and a spirit of fearless pursuit, which he adopted to solve some of medicine's hardest problems. Just last year, a team of researchers led by Professor Mayosi

made international headlines for identifying the gene that is a major cause of sudden death by heart failure among young people and athletes. Given his unwavering dedication to every project he tackled, it was unsurprising that part of his contribution to this major medical breakthrough was spending 20 years monitoring a South African family that was affected by this disorder.

Living to serve

His was a life lived in service – particularly to those less fortunate – which led him to focus many of his research efforts on improving public health and on diseases that affect the poor. Professor Mayosi partnered with the Life Foundation on the 'Heart Health for Kids' Mobile Clinic Project, implementing rheumatic heart disease (RHD) screenings in 23 disadvantaged schools in Langa and Bonteheuwel in Cape Town between 2007 and 2012. The project secured the

link between poverty and the incidents of RHD in children.

While anyone else might have stopped there, Professor Mayosi's passion and dedication to the project led to the establishment of the first patient register of RHD from other countries in Africa, the Middle East and India, and triggered a global movement to register all cases of RHD in the world through the Global Rheumatic Heart Disease Register or REMEDY study, an initiative that continues to be led by UCT.

Dr Shrey Viranna, Group CEO for the Life Healthcare Group, spoke of the loss to the medical profession and South Africa at large shortly after his passing: 'Professor Mayosi's work and research in improving public health in South Africa has and will continue to have a great impact in our communities. We are thankful for the role he played as a founding trustee of the Life Foundation and the outcomes achieved through the Heart Health for Kids Mobile Clinic Project.'

The human face of kindness

While his legacy to the medical community is undeniable, colleagues, friends, family and students concur that it's the professor's humility that they will remember; his easy smile, his willingness to stop and talk to every patient during ward rounds and lean in closer when students sought his counsel, and the way he made everyone he met want to be the best they could be. Perhaps that's the lesson we can draw from his life: to serve with kindness and compassion and to lead with love, regardless of status or stature. This brilliant medic, adored husband and father, and treasured friend and mentor will be dearly missed. ■