

WITSIE AT THE CUTTING EDGE: Researcher Profile

Dr Gill Nelson

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Who are you and what is your academic/scientific background?

I completed my BSc Hons degree in Human Genetics at Wits. I then started training as an Occupational Epidemiologist in the Epidemiology Unit at the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH) in the mid-1980s. While at the NIOH I gained enormous experience and managed to complete an MSc (Med) degree. I left the NIOH for a few years and returned in 2001, to be a Programme Manager of the Pathology Unit. I have also recently succeeded in completing my PhD degree. I am currently a Senior Lecturer and the Postgraduate Research Coordinator for the Masters programmes in the Epidemiology and Biostatistics Division in the School of Public Health.



What is the nature of the research that you are currently undertaking?

I am currently involved in a project that is modelling data to predict how many cases of mesothelioma will develop in a cohort of asbestos exposed miners within the next 10 years. For the last few years I have been involved in two large NIH-funded studies in the manganese mining industry. My colleagues and I hope to start a study on the community effects of manganese later this year.

What do you think is the most significant contribution you have made to research/science?

The analysis of trends in silicosis that I submitted as part of my PhD was published in *Environmental Health Perspectives* and received much interest from the scientific community. The papers published while at the NIOH have been cited numerous times.

Did you have a particular mentor or supervisor who inspired you in research?

Professor Margot Becklake was my first mentor, and triggered my interest in research. Professor Tony Davies who employed me in my first job, to this day inspires me to stretch myself to my limits. The person to whom I owe the most for my research career is Professor Jill Murray. She both mentored and supervised me throughout the long years of my PhD and my time at NIOH. She was often critical but always encouraging, and I continue to value both her opinion and her friendship.

Tell us about what you do when you're not busy at work and carrying out cutting-edge research?

I have two teenagers who keep me very busy. Both have busy social lives so I spend a lot of time in the car driving them to various events. I choose to do relaxing things when time allows, such as having dinner with close friends, watching movies and live shows, or reading a good book.

Read one of Gill's papers: Nelson G, Girdler-Brown B, Ndlovu N and Murray J. Three Decades of Silicosis: Disease Trends at Autopsy in South African Gold Miners. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 2010; 118(3):421-6.