

WITSIE AT THE CUTTING EDGE: Researcher Profile

Professor Haroon Saloojee

Personal Professor, Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, Division of Community Paediatrics



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

I am a personal Professor in the Division of Community Paediatrics. I've spent my entire life at Wits - as a medical student, paediatric registrar, Master's student and staff member. I am also a principal specialist at the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital. A Stecker international scholarship allowed me to spend time in Ohio, USA, early in my career. I have received a merit award from the American Academy of Paediatrics and have been rated by the *BMJ* as one of its top 10% of reviewers.

Explain the nature of the research that you are currently undertaking.

My current research relates to understanding and improving the delivery of health care programmes for young children, particularly in the first 1000 days of life. In recent years, I have increasingly moved from conducting primary research to interpreting and translating research into policies and programmes.

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

It is difficult to single out a single paper or piece of research. I exult in my students' achievements and am proud that I supported eminent researchers such as Professors Glenda Gray and Shabir Madhi early in their research careers. My research interests are expansive, including trying to convince clinicians to use evidence more appropriately (I have trained a generation of GEMP students in the ways of evidence-based medicine), serving as a reviewer for over 25 international and local journals, and engaging with cutting-edge global clinical research through my role as Chair of a US National Institutes of Health (NIH) data and safety monitoring board (DSMB). The latter has been exciting. Not too many researchers know about DSMBs, but they are critical in ensuring study integrity and patient safety. You usually only hear of them when they stop studies early, sometimes because of an exciting new discovery; other times because of futility or harm.

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

Professor Alan Rothberg inspired me early in my career and Professor Pete Cooper offered me my first researcher trainee pants in the neonatal unit at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital.

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

I love travelling and have managed to visit all five continents. Often it is a research related activity that got me there. I used to be a keen sportsman – running, soccer and squash - but regrettably I am more of an armchair exponent these days. My summer weekends are spent on the banks of the Vaal cajoling my laptop.

Read one of Haroon's papers: Ellenberg S, Fernandes RM, Saloojee H, et al. StaR Child Health Group. Standard 3: data monitoring committees. *Pediatrics*, 2012;129 Suppl 3:S132-7. (A useful primer on the role of DSMBs)