

# WITSIE AT THE CUTTING EDGE: Researcher Profile

**Professor Judith Bruce**

**Head of School of Therapeutic Sciences**



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

I studied nursing at the University of Western Cape (UWC) during the turbulent years of apartheid more than 40 years ago and despite “political interruptions”, managed to complete my degree in 1977. I practiced as a Registered Nurse at the Tygerberg Hospital before relocating to Johannesburg where I worked at the Coronation Hospital and Nursing College for a number of years. During this time I furthered my postgraduate education at Wits and was awarded the Raymond and Marjorie Dart Medal for the most distinguished graduand and obtained the

MSc (Nursing) degree with distinction. I joined Wits in 1993 as a lecturer in the Department of Nursing Education. I am a recipient of the PV Tobias Distinguished Teacher’s Award and was acknowledged for maintaining excellence in postgraduate teaching in 2010 before my appointment as Head of the School.

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

The nature of my work and the position that I hold, unfortunately, takes me away from clinical nursing research - so my research focus is on education scholarship looking at pedagogy and progressive approaches in nurse education. As a corollary to this, a big part of my work is about developing the next generation of nurse researchers locally and on the African continent. I am leading the Wits team in the NEPAD funded initiative to improve the postgraduate qualifications of nurses at nursing schools and hospitals in Mozambique where specialist skills are lacking. The most recent capacity development project that I have collaborated on, is the Santrust National PhD development programme for nurses funded by Irish Aid and the NRF. As the project drew to a close we evaluated the PhD programme using a comparative effectiveness research (CER) design.

Read Judy’s paper on this project at:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0260691715000325>

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

Over the last 18 years at least 45 nurses have obtained either their master’s or doctoral degree under my supervision here at Wits. The research work that I do has enabled me to engage with and mentor nurse clinicians and nurse academics in South Africa and on the African continent. Many of these nurses have taken up important leadership positions in hospitals and universities in South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Malawi, Kenya, Botswana, Lesotho and more recently in Mozambique.

I guess the significance of my work is affirmed by my induction as a Fellow of the Academy of Nursing in South Africa in recognition of my national and international contribution to nursing education and scholarship; my appointment as Chairperson of the International Academic Nursing Alliance; and my appointment as a member of

the Standing Committee on Health of the Academy of Science of South Africa. This group is currently working on a Consensus study to re-conceptualise education and training of an appropriate health workforce.

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

My parents bought me my first microscope, thinking I would become a basic scientist! They were my first inspiration, teaching me the values of a good education and a questioning mind. In academia there are a few persons I can think of, however, Emeritus Professor Barbara Robertson has had a profound influence on my research track and the skills I acquired along the way. In a very sparse research culture at the time, she taught me not only the “how to” of research but also ways to navigate the resource and capacity challenges that confront researchers.

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

I seldom have spare time so most of my leisurely activities are not too time consuming. I am an ardent supporter of Seven's rugby and enjoy aerobics, walking, flower arranging and doing quick crossword puzzles. Some weekends I do community outreach work associated with the “Works of Mercy” at my church. Family time is an essential part of my life away from the office.