

WITSIE AT THE CUTTING EDGE: Researcher Profile

Professor Maryna Steyn

Head of School of Anatomical Sciences



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

I graduated from the University of Pretoria (UP) with an MBChB in 1983. After a few years in clinical practice I obtained a position in the Department of Anatomy at the University of Pretoria in 1988. Here I developed an interest in Physical Anthropology. I obtained a PhD from Wits in 1994, working on the skeletal remains from Mapungubwe.

Awards I have received include being appointed as Exceptional Achiever by UP three times, a certificate of appreciation from the UN for work done on identification of human remains from Angola and being awarded the Spinoza Chair (visiting professorship) from the University of Amsterdam in 2015.

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

I focus on two areas: Forensic Anthropology and Bioarchaeology. Within the broad field of Bioarchaeology I focus on the assessment of health and disease in past populations (Palaeopathology). I particularly enjoyed a recent project we did on skeletal manifestations of TB in modern remains, as it bridges the gap between Palaeopathology and modern medicine. Current research in Forensic Anthropology include a project on age estimation in adults as well as studies on patterns of decomposition in a South African setting.

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

I think I have played a significant role in establishing Forensic Anthropology as a discipline in South Africa. We have also been involved in several repatriations, as well as prominent archaeological excavations of human remains such as those from Thulamela.

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

Maciej Henneberg, who was my PhD supervisor, played the most significant role in my development as researcher.

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

I play tennis and do birdwatching. We also love to travel and being outdoors.

Read one of Maryna's papers: Steyn M, Scholtz Y, Botha D, Pretorius S (2013). The changing face of tuberculosis: Trends in tuberculosis-associated skeletal changes. *Tuberculosis* 93:467-474.