

WITSIE AT THE CUTTING EDGE: Researcher Profile

Professor Saraladevi Naicker

Professor in the School of Clinical Medicine



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

I am a nephrologist, having been head of the Division of Nephrology at the University of KwaZulu Natal (1994-2001) and subsequently the University of the Witwatersrand (2001-2014). I also completed a 5-year term as academic head of the Department of Internal Medicine which ended in December 2013. I attended a small school in the village of Braemar and high school in Umzinto on the south coast of KwaZulu Natal. My undergraduate and postgraduate training were at the University of KwaZulu Natal in Durban, with short stints training in Nephrology at Wits, Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the UK, and Tel Aviv, Israel. Research training and my PhD were at the University of KwaZulu Natal. I was honoured with the International Distinguished Medal of the NKF (USA) in 2005; Convocation/Phillip Tobias Distinguished Teaching Award of the University of the Witwatersrand in 2006;

Roscoe Robinson Award of the International Society of Nephrology in 2009; Invited participant in webcast panel discussions on occasion of 50th anniversary of International Society of Nephrology, Geneva in June 2010; Arthur Landau Lecturer of the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa in 2010; and the Exceptional Service Medal, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand in December 2013. In addition, I served on numerous committees of professional societies nationally (including as President of the SA Renal Society and the SA Transplantation Society) and internationally and on the Council of several international nephrology societies: International Society of Nephrology; International Society of Peritoneal Dialysis; African Association of Nephrology and on the Executive of the International Society of Nephrology and KDIGO. I currently have a C1 NRF rating.

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

My earlier research focused on establishing prevalence and patterns of kidney disease. We are currently looking at the pathogenesis and mechanisms of kidney disease, including in HIV infection.

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

Kidney disease was vastly under-reported in Africa, and we have contributed to the body of literature on the prevalence and patterns of the kidney disease in Africa. We showed that severe kidney disease (HIV-associated nephropathy or HIVAN) in HIV infection may present in asymptomatic individuals, manifesting only with albuminuria. We recently showed the highest association ever reported of APOL1 risk alleles in HIVAN.

Han TM, Naicker S, Ramdial PK, Assounga AG (2006). A cross-sectional study of HIV-seropositive patients with varying degrees of proteinuria in South Africa. *Kidney Int*; 69: 2243-2250. The publication that established our credibility internationally as researchers in HIV- kidney disease; the lead author was Dr T Han my masters student.

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

My PhD supervisor, Professor Kanti Bhoola was an amazing mentor. I learnt from his enthusiasm, collaborative and analytic skills that with commitment and hard work, one could achieve one's goals.

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

I am an avid reader and enjoy nothing more than finding time to read; I enjoy travels to far-away places with good friends; I am also discovering the joys of gardening, though am not very skilled at it as yet.

Read one of Sarala's papers: Kasembeli A, Duarte R, Ramsay M, Mosiane P, Dickens C, Dix-Peek T, Limou S, Sezgin E, Nelson GW, Kopp JB, Winkler CA, Naicker S (2015). APOL1 risk variants show the highest reported association with HIV-Associated Nephropathy (HIVAN) in Black South Africans. *J Am Soc Nephrol* 26: ccc-ccc. doi: 10.1681/ASN.2014050469.