Motivation for the award of a University Gold Medal

to

**Stuart Grant Morris**

In April 2011 Stuart Morris completed a period of sixteen years of uninterrupted membership on the University’s Council and its various subcommittees. While Stuart Morris’ tenure on Council has come to an end, his service to the University continues in his role as Chairman of the Board of the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre. The University wishes to acknowledge the past, and continuing commitment of Stuart Morris by awarding him its most prestigious award for service, the University Gold Medal.

Stuart Morris was appointed to the Council of the University in 1996, but he had been invited to join its Audit Committee the previous year. Stuart was sought out for appointment to Council at a time when it had lost many of its members with backgrounds in business and finance. He had been the Senior Partner of KPMG, one the ‘big four’ auditing firms in the country and globally, and at the time of his appointment he was Financial Director of Nedcor. Both these positions, and the experience they conferred on him, made his expertise critically important for the Council.

Stuart Morris became a member of the Executive Committee of Council, and of the key subcommittee, the Council Finance Committee. He served on the Wits Foundation Board of Governors concurrently.

During the sixteen years of Stuart’s tenure, Council was called on to lead the University through a period of unprecedented growth in student numbers and changes in leadership, notably of three Vice-Chancellors, and a financial crisis which threatened both the financial sustainability and reputation of the Institution. During these tumultuous times, in the words of the Chairman of Council at that time, Stuart Morris “proved to be a wise, patient and ever-available member”.

In 2002 the University approached Stuart to take on an additional role, that of member of the Board of Directors of the Wits University Donald Gordon Medical Centre (WDGMC) when the University purchased the Kenridge Hospital. He became Vice-Chairman of the Board, and when two successive chairmen of the WDGMC Board resigned because of the workload and huge responsibility, Stuart was asked to assume the Chairmanship of the Board. In that capacity, he has steered the WDGMC masterfully for the past seven years.

At the time the hospital, despite attracting an investment of R200 million, was floundering, consuming funds daily, and its multiple stakeholders often were at odds with one another.

Stuart was involved in appointing the first and subsequent CEOs of the Hospital and a series of senior executives. He also provided detailed support to them, in part because of their lack of capacity and experience in financial accounting and management.

Stuart Morris’ commitment to the WDGMC went way beyond that normally expected of a non-executive Director and Chairman, putting much of his time and energy into the project each week. He became a passionate advocate for the hospital project when defending its performance in the University Finance Committee, or when more funds were needed from the University and from donors. Moreover, he became involved in internal public relations such as regular staff functions with administrators and medical staff, end-of-year parties, welcomes and retirement events, and assisting with resolving interpersonal conflicts. All of this was voluntary. The only condition of his commitment was that no meetings could be held on Wednesdays – golf was sacrosanct!

In 2005 the University sought a partner within the private health-care sector to take over the hospital administration. Stuart played a key role in negotiating the joint shareholding with MediClinic and continued as Chairman of the new Board, with its own challenges. Despite the significant technical and administrative capacity which became available to the hospital through the partnership, Stuart remained fully involved and hands-on. He helped fashion a new institutional culture that was consistent with the original intention and ethos of the Wits DGMC, that of a private academic hospital, an ethos quite unfamiliar to its new shareholder, a large, multinational, listed corporate hospital group.

Stuart’s faith in the hospital project was unwavering and persuasive. In 2008 he raised a further R5m from the University to unlock a matched amount from MediClinic to enable the establishment of a Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory.

Stuart Morris was Chairman of the Board of the WDGMC at a time when the project was at its most precarious, and when failure could have dragged the University into another financial crisis. But his faith in the project, determination, decisiveness and astute financial management, has steered the project to financial turnaround and profitability. Its increasingly significant role in training clinical subspecialists for the nation, and offering health care of the highest standard in the country is, in no small part, attributable to the leadership provided by Stuart Morris.

Stuart’s achievements, not just at the WDGMC and in the University Council and its committees, but also throughout his long and successful career, have been built on his warm personality and generous spirit, and his ability to be compassionate and supportive to those with whom he works. Stuart’s success has been a result, too, of sound judgment and strong leadership when needed. He has shown outstanding ability to deal with difficult situations without flinching, calmness in crisis, and perhaps most of all, wisdom.

Stuart Morris, a Wits alumnus, has served the University in times which were among its most difficult. His role in the success and sustainability of the WDGMC is unequivocal and beyond doubt. The value created for the University by Stuart’s service on its Council may not be as overt as are the hospital’s financial statements and bed occupancy rates, but that the University is a better, more stable, wiser institution for Stuart Morris’ participation cannot be overstated.

HPL  
October 2011