Professor Jeffry Cohen (1937-2017)

Obituary

Professor Jeffry Cohen was born in Kuruman in 1937, and received his high school education at Parktown Boys High in Johannesburg. He graduated from Wits School of Dentistry in 1960, winning awards for the Most Outstanding Graduand, for Children’s Dentistry, and the Medal for Operative Dentistry. He much later self-teasingly wrote that thereafter, “[e]go suitably inflated”, he practiced in England until his return to a junior teaching position at Wits, during which time he studied for the Higher Diploma in Dentistry, in Prosthodontics, which he completed in 1968, and registered as a prosthodontist in 1972.

In 1973 he was invited to the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, as a visiting associate professor in the department of Crown & Bridge for a year, thereafter being offered tenure, and staying for 7 years in total. But, “growing increasingly homesick”, he returned to South Africa in 1980, entering into fulltime practice in Cape Town, before accepting the position of Professor, Chief Specialist and Head of Department of Conservative Dentistry at the University of the Western Cape, where he was based from 1985 to1988. In 1988 he returned to his alma mater to head the department of Conservative Dentistry at Wits, until 1998, during which time he twice received the JF van Reenen Award, voted for by students, for Best Lecturer in Clinical Years in the Wits School of Dentistry, in 1993 and 1996. He also continued his private prosthodontic practice in Johannesburg.

Prof Cohen was actively involved with what he termed “dental politics” in South Africa throughout his career, engaging with, developing and promoting best practice, ethics and exchange in the industry. He served as the President of the Odontological Society in 1969; was a committee member of the Dental Association of South Africa (DASA, which later became SADA); President of DASA’s Southern Transvaal Branch (1993 & 1994); Chair of DASA’s Ethical Committee from 1992-1996; Federal Councillor for DASA for the 1993-1996 Triennium; member of the Dental Technicians Affairs Committee (1993-1996); member of the Practice Review Committee, representing the Paedodontic Society and Academy of Prosthodontics (1993-1996); founder member of the South African Division of the International Association for Dental Research; executive member of the Committee on Preventative Dentistry (1993-1996); Vice-President of the Alpha Omega Dental Fraternity Cape Town Chapter (1986-1987); President of the Academy of Prosthodontics of South Africa (1992-1993); Vice-President (1991-1993) and then President (1993-1994) of the Paedodontic Society of South Africa. He was awarded Honorary Life Membership of the Academy of Prosthodontics in 2005.

Professor Cohen was widely published, and also presented numerous special lectures throughout South Africa and across the globe, including in the USA, Canada, Brazil, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore, covering the vast areas of his dental expertise, including dental techniques, TMJ disorders, all ceramic and cerammometal crowns, and gold restorations.

As accomplished as he was in the field of Dentistry, he was also a passionate gardener, who particularly loved and cultivated orchids, a lover of art and music, an enthusiastic and skilled ceramicist, an accomplished cook and passionate foodie, a lover of dogs, especially his beloved bulldogs over the years, and pug, a wonderful storyteller, a seasoned traveller, and a man who was much loved for his wisdom, creative ingenuity and rich humour.

He is survived by his loving partner of nearly 44 years, Gary Leach, his sister, nieces and nephews, cousins, and many devoted friends.

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