

Dr Michael Plit



Dr Michael Plit (MB BCh, FCP (SA), FCCP) was born in Vereeniging in 1937 to Lithuanian immigrants. He matriculated in 1953 from General Smuts High School in his hometown and entered medical school at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1954. He completed his internship in 1960, and

commenced training as a medical registrar at what is now Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in 1962. He qualified as a physician in 1965.

In 1967 he married his wife, Eve. Shortly after Mike was awarded a scholarship in February 1967, the couple moved to Jerusalem, where he worked at the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. In June 1967, Mike was appointed leader of the triage station just as the Six-Day Arab-Israeli war broke out.

In November 1967, Mike and his wife embarked on a tour of Europe, returning to South Africa (SA) in 1968, where he opened the first private pulmonology practice in Johannesburg. He was a founding member of the SA Pulmonology Society (SAPS; now the SA Thoracic Society (SATS)) in July 1968. His only daughter was born in 1970.

In 1980, Mike entered public sector practice. He spent 5 years working at JG Strijdom Hospital (now Helen Joseph Hospital), where he founded the first respiratory unit and established a renowned asthma clinic that held monthly meetings between clinicians and patients. In 1985,

Mike returned to private practice in Johannesburg.

In 1990, he was appointed personal physician to the late Nelson Mandela. He retired officially in 2011, and was awarded the Chris Barnard certificate in recognition of 'outstanding service to the medical profession and the people of SA'. Despite being retired, he was often summoned to Qunu to attend to Nelson Mandela's medical problems.

Mike served as National Asthma Education Programme (NAEP) president from 1999 to 2000, as president of SAPS from 1992 to 1993, and was awarded honorary fellowship by SAPS.

On 7 May 2020, Mike passed away in the comfort of his home. He is survived by his wife, Eve, daughter Lisa, son-in-law, two grandsons and his younger brother, Clive.

Mike was a pioneer in the field of pulmonology in SA – he was instrumental in establishing the subspecialty and in developing the careers of many of our past and current pulmonologists. His immense contributions and humility will not be forgotten.