

A time for reflection

The Department of Surgery at the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Health Sciences, School of Medicine, is 60 years old. An age of full maturity, and also a good time to reflect on a lifetime of serving the profession by producing quality practitioners and specialists properly trained in the principles of General Surgery. The Department has endeavoured to produce doctors who will be able to serve the community wherever they go. We have always aimed to train doctors who are proficient in diagnosis, can provide good quality clinical medicine, and have a sound approach to problem solving. This very practical approach emerges from a knowledge and understanding of current developments taking place in the surgical environment, both nationally and internationally. The Department has consistently produced doctors who have served the public in settings ranging from remote little country mission hospitals to the most esteemed ivory towers of academia.

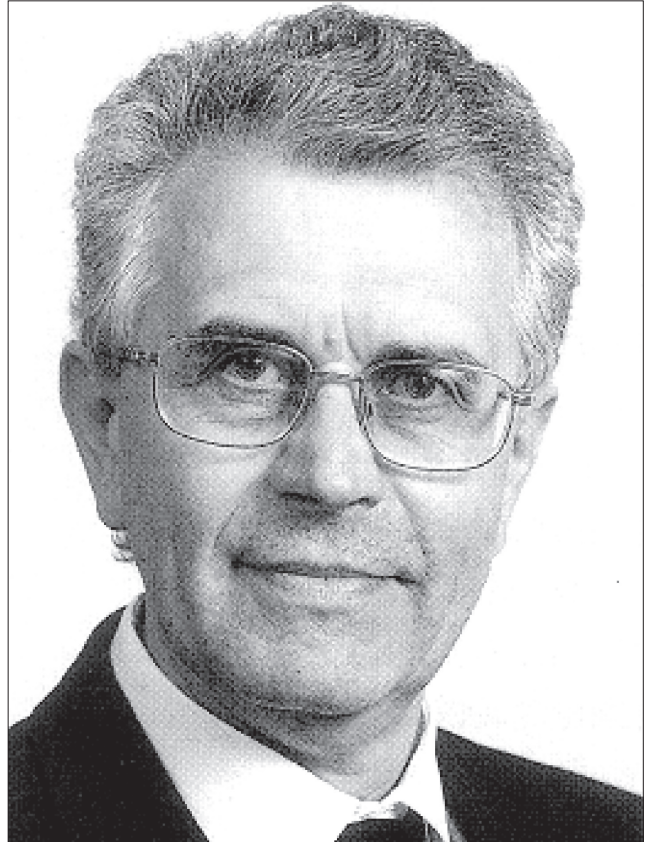
In this issue of *SAJS* we have put together a series of articles that are varied in their nature but, characteristically, are academic yet very practical in their application.

The most basic mode of research is to do an audit of what is being done in a certain condition. Another mode of research is to have a hypothesis and attempt to prove it. The latter type of research is very prevalent within the Department, and we are continuously probing the frontiers of scientific thought. See, for example, the article on testosterone levels in males.

Another test of efficacy is to take individual patients' case presentations, and follow them up for an extended period of time to see whether what has been done is to the advantage of the patient, or alternatively because a case has particular nuances that deserve mention, e.g. melanoma of the vermilion of the lip.

A good example of audit research is to look at a series of cases and analyse the morbidity, mortality and outcomes. This was done in the papers describing emergency endovascular repair of ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysms, cerebral monitoring during carotid endarterectomy, and a prospective comparison of secondary interventions and mortality in open and endovascular infrarenal abdominal aortic aneurysm repair. In case presentations the test of time is applied to the proposed treatment, for example in the papers on total gastrectomy in the management of Zollinger-Ellison syndrome, the long-term result of tracheal repair with the sternocleidomastoid myoperiosteal flap, or the long-term follow-up of a patient with terminal hypercholesterolaemia. All these patients have survived more than 10 years, and in such cases the test of time is the best arbiter.

Audit research is regarded as the most basic form of research but also as one of the most essential forms, because constant monitoring of outcomes, morbidity and mortality



is absolutely vital in any department where real pathology is being treated. 'Without research it is unethical to practise clinical medicine.'

Case presentations are frequently looked down on by editors, but when the test of time is applied, the relevant treatment of the respective cases may be justified.

My sincere appreciation to Professor Carl Franz, who has been a driving force behind this publication, and last but not least a sincere word of appreciation to the staff of the Department of Surgery, who tirelessly give of their time and abilities to ensure the complete training of our under- and postgraduate students.

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