

UP veterinarian features in children's book about local pioneers

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Professor Gerhard Steenkamp, Head of the Dentistry and Maxillofacial Surgery Clinic at UP's Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital, is featured in an Afrikaans children's book that consists of 102 stories about South African pioneers in science and other fields.

Titled *Uitvinders, Planmakers en Ander Slimkoppe van Suid-Afrika* (Inventors, Masterminds and Other Brainiacs of South Africa) and written by Engela Duvenage, the book is being translated into English and is expected to be available by mid-2021. Prof Steenkamp appears in a chapter about working with animals with big teeth.

The world-renowned maxillofacial surgeon is often featured for his life-saving dental surgery on various wildlife species such as elephants, members of the big cat family, gorillas, chimpanzees and even seals. His work has made news headlines nationally and internationally.

"I am humbled to have been asked to be part of this book," he says. "In my wildest dreams, I never thought of being mentioned in the same breath as Dr Jotello Festiri Soga and Prof Jan Bonsma, both men of stature who mean so much to me as a veterinarian and to us as South Africans."



The book, with illustrations by Tumi K Steyn, is available in shops. It tells the story of, among others, the first heart transplant by Dr Christian Barnard and of Dr Jotello Festiri Soga, the first South African who qualified as a veterinary surgeon at the University of Edinburgh in 1886 and who played a role in eradicating rinderpest. In 2009, UP's Faculty of Veterinary Science named its library in his honour.

“When I started out as veterinarian, I dreamed of working with animal’s teeth and jaws, but never in a million years would I have imagined how my career would evolve,” Prof Steenkamp adds.

Among his achievements is his recent success with Makokou, the gorilla from the Johannesburg Zoo that was airlifted to the faculty by helicopter for a historic CT scan; and the subsequent unique joint surgical procedure with various role players at the zoo to clear the gorilla’s nasal passages.

Prof Steenkamp also did intricate dental surgery on Grand, an elephant at the Tbilisi Zoo in Georgia, with Prof Adrian Tordiffe to remove the animal’s infected tusk.

In addition, he performed a first-of-its kind operation in 2017 to surgically lengthen the misaligned jaw of an adult male chimpanzee; the procedure was conducted in collaboration with Dr Katja Koepfel of UP’s Faculty of Veterinary Science and a human maxillofacial surgeon, Dr Frits Hoogendijk.

Prof Steenkamp – who recently completed his PhD on structure, development and pathology of the cheetah maxillofacial complex – completed his BVSc degree in 1994 at UP’s Faculty of Veterinary Science, after obtaining his BSc (Zoology) degree there. He completed the inaugural course in dentistry offered by the European School for Advanced Veterinary Studies in 1998. After three years in Europe, he returned to UP, where he has been Head of the Dentistry and

Maxillofacial Surgery Clinic. He did his MSc on the clinically relevant morphometrics of African elephant tusks.

In 2017, Prof Steenkamp became a founding member of the Certificate in Zoo and Wildlife Dentistry under the auspices of the American Veterinary Dental College. His research interests include developmental dentistry and maxillofacial surgery of non-domesticated species. He has lectured in many parts of North America, Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa.

For more information about the book, visit <https://www.graffitiboeke.co.za/af/373051/Boeke> or email Engela Duvenage at engeladuvnage@gmail.com

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