

# UP alumnus only second South African to receive gold medal from the OIE for outstanding international veterinary service

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*Dr Gideon Brückner*

The [World Organisation for Animal Health](#) (OIE) has awarded Dr Gideon Brückner, an alumnus of the University of Pretoria's (UP) Faculty of Veterinary Science, the OIE Gold Medal for 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, physical award ceremonies have been postponed and will resume once the annual General Sessions are held again in person. Dr Bruckner was officially recognised at the OIE's virtual General Session and he recently received his gold medal during an event in Cape Town facilitated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development.

Dr Brückner is only the second South African veterinarian to receive this prestigious award, which is one of the highest international honours for any individual \*

The medal is a mark of international recognition awarded to individuals who have distinguished themselves by their outstanding service in the field of veterinary science, and their significant contribution to the technological and scientific development of activities relating to the objectives of the OIE.

"I feel extremely humble and honoured to have received this prestigious award and recognition by the World Organisation for Animal Health," said Dr Brückner, who graduated from the Faculty of Veterinary Science in 1972. "I would like to thank my family and many colleagues all over the world for their support and for working side by side with me – without which, this achievement would not have been possible. I am also thankful that South Africa will receive recognition through this award."



*Dr Brückner delivers his acceptance speech during the recent event during which he received the medal*

Dr Brückner was President of the OIE Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases until his retirement in 2018. He is also a former OIE Deputy Director-General, and Head of the Scientific and Technical Department in Paris – the first and only South African to have held this post to date.

Dr Brückner has spent his entire career of 47 years as a veterinarian within provincial, national and international veterinary services. During this time, he served as Director of Veterinary Public Health, Director of Animal Health and Director of Veterinary Services of the national Department of Agriculture, respectively, as well as Chief Director of Veterinary Services in the Western Cape.

His major achievements include his role in the control of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD). Dr Brückner was involved in several campaigns to control outbreaks of FMD in South Africa, to rid the incidental incursion of FMD serotype O as well as incursions of the disease from neighbouring countries. He considers his role in the elimination of FMD in South America as one of his greatest achievements. Here, he was instrumental in introducing the concept of a high-surveillance zone in the MERCOSUR countries; this eventually resulted in freedom from disease for these countries, as well as for Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

Dr Brückner still serves as an accredited OIE mission expert who assesses animal disease control, notably FMD, in member countries, visiting more than 70 countries on consulting missions on behalf and at the request of the organisation.

He has represented South Africa on several missions abroad and led several delegations to negotiate the allocation or reinstatement of internationally recognised status of freedom from animal diseases for South Africa. He has also been active in an expert advisory capacity for other international organisations such as the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation, World Health Organisation and the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

He was the first South African veterinarian to serve as a nominated expert on legal dispute panels for animal health for the WTO, and has chaired numerous ad hoc OIE expert groups. He served as a member of the OIE's Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases for 12 years. During this period, he played a significant role in developing and formalising OIE standards on the control of major animal diseases, and assessing and monitoring the allocation and maintenance of freedom status from OIE-listed diseases by OIE member countries.

In 2005, the South African Veterinary Association awarded him the Presidents' Award and Medal in recognition of his exceptional service in the advancement of veterinary science in South Africa. In 2008, he delivered the Arnold Theiler Memorial Lecture which, at the time, formed part of the Faculty of Veterinary Science's contribution to UP's centenary celebrations. His lecture on new challenges for the veterinary profession in global animal disease control and the trade in animals and animal products highlighted the challenge for veterinarians, politicians and the public in addressing the rapid, global spread of highly infectious diseases.

\*In 2015, another UP Faculty of Veterinary Science alumnus, Dr Roy Bengis was the recipient of the gold medal.

If you are aware of any Faculty of Veterinary Science alumni who have excelled internationally or with noteworthy achievements on national level, please contact us at [upvetscience@gmail.com](mailto:upvetscience@gmail.com).

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