

Dr Frank Anderson

22 February 1962 – 2 January 2023

It is with a heavy heart that we inform the surgical community of the untimely death of a most accomplished colleague, Dr Frank Anderson, in Durban on 2 January 2023. Frank was a unique person in the summer of his life; a life truncated far too soon when he still had so much to offer.

Frank was educated at the Little Flower Roman Catholic combined high school in Ixopo. He then went on to study medicine at the University of Natal Medical School from 1982–1989. After graduating, he completed his internship at King Edward VIII Hospital before moving to Port Elizabeth where he practised as a General Practitioner from 1991–1995. From an early age, like many scholars and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, he was an activist and joined the Azania Student Movement. During his general practice years, Frank became the Port Elizabeth Treasurer of AZAPO and subsequently the national director of health for the organisation. He was the Eastern Cape undercover commander of the exiled military wing of the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania.

Frank returned to Durban in 1996 and commenced his training in the Department of Surgery. I was his academic mentor over the first 12 years of this decade and was involved with his career development as a registrar, a newly appointed consultant after attaining his FCS in 2000, and more recently as a hepatopancreato-biliary (HPB) subspecialist.

I encountered many of Frank's idiosyncrasies and attributes that made him the unique individual he was. If you were an outsider attempting to form an initial opinion about his abilities based solely on his physical appearance and his rather direct approach to social discourse, you would think him a man you would want on your side if you ever got involved in a bar room brawl. Indeed, he was an accomplished boxer during his last two years at school and early years at medical school, where he was known as the ring destroyer under the moniker "dissecting machine". I believe Frank would have fulfilled this role as protector should it have become necessary. These first impressions did not immediately strike me as those of someone with academic potential. However, once I engaged with him, I realised there was much more to the man than met the eye. His interest, as mine, was in hepatobiliary surgery. I supervised his Master of Medicine degree, awarded in 2007, on lipid levels in pancreatitis. The findings were published in several highly respected journals and presented at international meetings. He extended this pancreatitis research theme into the highly relevant aspect of its relationship to HIV infection for his PhD. Despite having moved to Cape Town in 2011, I continued as his supervisor and have watched and encouraged his development as a researcher and an HPB surgeon. However, at times during the process, I felt his computer skills did not match his



intellect, but through mutual respect, we prevailed, and in 2019 he was awarded his PhD.

His intimidating physique and brusque nature notwithstanding, there was a humorous side to Frank typified in a case report, that frequently became embellished in the Department of Surgery at Addington Hospital, entitled "hook line and finger" about a packet of fishhooks and a finger that required extrication.

The earliest recollection of Frank by Ines Buccimazza, a close colleague for over 20 years, is best embodied by the words of Mahatma Gandhi: "If I have the belief that I can do it, I will surely acquire the capacity to do it, even if I may not have it at the beginning". Her lasting memory is summed up in the attitudes of two philosophers: when Cicero spoke, people said "Good speech", but that when Demosthenes spoke, they said, "Let's march". Frank was Demosthenes. We, his colleagues in Surgery, should continue to march in his footsteps and strive to maintain his legacy.

As you can see from his colleague's appraisal, Frank was not a man to rest on his laurels and he brought his research experience to the registrars MMED projects supervision and to collaborative research with basic scientists at the medical school. He enthusiastically embraced initiatives and new ideas, particularly if they furthered the patients' interests. As the head of Specialised Services at IALCH since 2011, he developed liver and pancreatic surgery to a high degree and established a much-needed service for the Province. He was highly regarded in the subspeciality nationally and was one of the leading exponents of endoscopic ultrasound.

Frank had no red carpet rolled out for him. He made truly remarkable strides by his dogged perseverance and intellect. Even as we are saddened by his loss, we must celebrate and remind Barbara, Amanda, Karen (Lisa) and Malcolm that they should be extremely proud of his professional achievements and even more proud of his achievements as a human being.

Sandie Thomson