

THE ACADEMY AND THE COLLEGE

A SHORT HISTORY OF ACADEMIC GENERAL
PRACTICE/FAMILY MEDICINE IN SOUTH AFRICA
1958 – 2000

by

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FOREWORD

Family Medicine in South Africa in the year 2001 is a well-developed, strong and growing discipline. There are Departments of Family Medicine at all eight Faculties of Health Sciences, teaching extensively at undergraduate levels, and running a large number of postgraduate programmes for family/general practitioners. There is a growing body of research supporting the discipline, with new projects initiated continuously. Family practitioners are leading the profession on medico-political, policy making, academic and statutory levels. The extraordinary successful 16th WONCA World Congress for Family Doctors held in Durban in May 2001 and the election of Prof Bruce Sparks as the WONCA President-Elect (World Organisation of National Colleges and Academies of Family Doctors) demonstrate South African family practice's prominent role in Family Medicine.

All of this however neither happened overnight nor by itself. The history of academic family/general practice in South Africa has been a long and uphill struggle to receive recognition for Family Medicine as a discipline in its own right. Many people devoted their lives to this cause, notably Dr Basil Jaffe. After graduating at the University of Cape Town in 1946, Dr Jaffe did three years of postgraduate training in Britain obtaining the DCH (RCPS). He became involved in academic general practice in South Africa in 1962 when he was elected member of the Cape of Good Hope Faculty of the College of General Practitioners. From this day onwards Dr Jaffe worked tirelessly towards the development of Family Medicine. One of his major achievements was to become the founding Chairman of the SA Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care from 1980 - 1984, and President of the

organisation from 1984 - 1988. He delivered a number of important papers and published amongst others on the content and attitudes of general practice. Dr Jaffe was extensively involved in teaching and received a number of honorary awards including Elected Fellow of the RCGP, Honorary Life Member of the NGPG, Distinguished Family Practitioner Medal of the University of Cape Town, and Honorary Life Member of the SA Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care.

Dr Jaffe has now made yet another valuable contribution to the family practice community by compiling this fascinating history of academic family/general practice in South Africa from 1958 to 2000. He tells the story from his personal perspective and with individualised emphasis, which makes it a very interesting piece of work. In this format the document contains important insights into the intricacies of family/general practice as it stands in South Africa in the year 2001.

I want to thank Dr Jaffe for this huge task. This document provides family practice in South Africa with a valuable resource on its history, and events to keep in mind in the mapping out of our future.

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National Chairperson
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THE EARLY YEARS

Many members of the Academy are puzzled by the existence of two academic organizations of general/family practice in our Country. Even stranger may appear the fact that some of our older practitioners in addition belong to a third body - the Royal College of General Practitioners. This apparent anomaly requires an explanation, which leads us to the beginnings of academic family medicine.

The College of General Practitioners came into existence in Britain in 1952 in the face of opposition from the three specialist Royal Colleges¹. It came about through the efforts of a group of outstanding general practitioners led by John Hunt who believed that the growth of specialization had heightened the need for the well-trained generalist.

Specialization was the inevitable consequence of the avalanche of knowledge and technology which had gathered momentum during the 20th Century. However, it had induced unintended consequences for the patient, society and the profession. Specialist medicine with its technical armoury is expensive for any society as is the shift from the home to hospital care. Specialism also tended to fragment medical care with its emphasis on disease rather than the patient. For the GP there was a growing frustration at the erosion of his traditional role. Nowhere was this process more serious than in the United States and it was here that practitioners first got together to form the American Academy of General Practice in 1947, later to be renamed the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Here, in South Africa the state of general practice was relatively healthy. Our problems were largely of maldistribution, geographic and socio-economic, but there were a number of outstanding doctors practising in urban and rural areas. They included ex-servicemen who had delayed their studies and careers to take part in the 2nd World War, men of maturity, authority and idealism. Developments in Europe and North America were being observed and communication was set up with the young colleges, particularly the British College, in view of our traditional links with British medicine.

General practitioners were influential in the Medical Association (MASA) at the time and persuaded the Association to use some of the profits of a recent congress to invite the President of the British College to South Africa. Thus in 1958, Dr Ian Grant undertook a tour of this country and encouraged our colleagues in the main centres to create faculties affiliated to the British College. So the first academic organization of our discipline was set up as the Cape of Good Hope & Witwatersrand Faculties of the College of General Practitioners in 1958. The Orange Free State, Eastern Cape and Natal Faculties followed shortly. Most

