

## Big Hitter in Pulmonology



Charles Feldman is currently the Distinguished Professor of Pulmonology in the Department of Internal Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa (SA) and has been in that position since 1 January 2018. Prior to that, he was Professor of Pulmonology and Chief Physician, Department of Internal Medicine, Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital and University of the Witwatersrand – a position he held from 1 May 1995. He has spent the entire 40 years of his medical career in academic medicine, with the vast majority of that time in pulmonology.

Prof. Feldman was born and brought up in Johannesburg, and matriculated in 1969. He then entered medical school and graduated in 1975, completing his internship in Medicine and Surgery in 1976, at the hospital then known as the Johannesburg General (affectionately, the 'Joburg Gen'). During his internship he worked for two doyens of medicine in SA, namely Prof. John Barlow (Department of Medicine) and Prof. DJ 'Sonny' du Plessis (Department of Surgery), each of whom had contributed substantially internationally to the advancement of knowledge in their fields of research. They instilled in him the way he continued to practice medicine throughout his career, with the 'old-fashioned' skills of thorough clinical examination and patiently waiting at the bedside for the patient to improve.

However, the Head of Academic Medicine at that time, Prof. Tom Bothwell (affectionately known as the 'Iron Man'

because of his research in iron metabolism), became his mentor and advised him how best to develop his career as an academic. His first recommendation was for Prof. Feldman to go out and get a PhD, which he received on the topic of community-acquired pneumonia (CAP) in 1991. Prof. Feldman was registered as a sub-specialist in pulmonology in SA in 1993, when registration was initiated for the first time in this sub-specialty, under the so-called grandfather clause, and in 1997 he was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians in the UK.

Prof. Bothwell's next recommendation was for Prof. Feldman to do postgraduate research in an overseas institution, preferably in the UK, where there were a number of internationally renowned Respiratory Departments. Between September 1988 and December 1989, Prof. Feldman became a Research Fellow and Honorary Senior Visiting Colleague, in the Host Defence Unit, Department of Thoracic Medicine, National Heart and Lung Institute, and Royal Brompton Hospital, London, United Kingdom. Prof. Feldman strongly believes that this experience put him onto the path to become the successful researcher he was. The experience taught him many laboratory-based techniques and skills that he was able to bring back to SA and continue to utilise for many years, as well as the power of collaboration – both between units and among different disciplines. Unfortunately, this type of collaboration was relatively uncommon in SA at that time. On his return from the UK, Prof. Feldman teamed up with Prof. Ronald Anderson from the Department of Immunology, University of Pretoria, which became a career-long collaboration across universities and an incredibly productive partnership. During subsequent years, he continued his research in CAP, which was truly translational including both clinical studies, as well as laboratory-based research, the latter of which he conducted personally, hands-on at the benchside, for a considerable number of years in Prof. Anderson's laboratory.

In 2009, Prof. Feldman received his Doctorate in Science (DSc) from the University of the Witwatersrand, also for

a thesis on the topic of CAP, which was a collection of clinical and laboratory-based studies undertaken on the topic of CAP over a period of some 30 years. He was encouraged by Prof. Peter Cleaton-Jones, another of Prof. Feldman's mentors, to achieve this DSc and was also successfully supervised by him in this process.

Prof. Feldman has over 350 publications in the indexed literature, including 3 books, 24 book chapters, 2 congress proceedings, 289 direct publications and 24 publications as part of collaborations. In addition, he has 44 DE-accredited publications and a substantial number of indexed abstracts. He has had over 200 presentations at congresses, more than half of which have been international. He has an H-index of 38 (web of Science), 42 (Scopus), and 54 (Google Scholar), respectively. The University Research Committee has accredited his University Research Unit, the 'Pulmonary Infection Research Unit', since 2000. Prof. Feldman's academic activities include the successful supervision of 22 higher degrees, being Editor-in-chief of the *Southern African Journal of Infectious Diseases*, Deputy Editor of *Pneumonia* and Associate Editor of *Respirology Case Reports*, as well as being on the editorial committee of many other international journals. Prof. Feldman has been active in a number of national and international scientific societies.

With regard to pulmonology in SA, Prof. Feldman has been a member of the South African Thoracic Society since 1983 and has been the President of the Society on two previous occasions (1996-1997 and 2001-2003). He was instrumental in setting up the training programme, curriculum and regulations for training in pulmonology in SA through the Society and the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa. For nearly 25 years, he was Academic Head of the largest pulmonology unit in South Africa, a unit that has also graduated the largest number of fellows in pulmonology. He was made an Honorary Fellow of the South African Thoracic Society in 2009 'in recognition by his peers for his outstanding contribution to the development of respiratory medicine in South Africa.' His contributions to respiratory

medicine have also been recognised internationally. In 2014, he was elected to the Fellowship of the European Respiratory Society (FERS) (Foundation Fellow) 'in recognition of excellence in scientific and/or educational contributions to respiratory medicine over many years.' In 2018, he was recognised as an American Thoracic Society (ATS) Fellow (ATSF), which 'is a mark of distinction, conferring recognition on members for their outstanding contributions to the society, as well as to the fields of pulmonary, critical care and sleep medicine.'

Prof. Feldman has received a number of awards for his research. He was the first awardee of the TH Bothwell Research Prize of the Department of Internal Medicine, University of the Witwatersrand, in 1993, which was a fitting tribute to the person Prof. Feldman considers his first mentor. He has received a number of best publication and best presentation awards of the South African Thoracic Society at their various congresses and the 'Top Ten Poster Award' of the American College of Chest Physicians Congress (CHEST) in 2006. In 2009, he received the Vice Chancellors Research Award from the University of the Witwatersrand, which is the premier research award of the University and is adjudicated across all faculties. In 2018, Prof. Feldman received the Platinum Scientific Achievement Award of the Medical Research Council of SA, in recognition of excellence in research.

However, one would be remiss not to mention Prof. Feldman's teaching skills for which he received the PV Tobias Medal and Convocation Award in 1998 for teaching in the Clinical Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, or his clinical contributions. Initially trained as a pulmonologist/intensivist, and running an intensive care unit at Hillbrow Hospital, which took up most of his time, he then moved across to Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital as Head of Pulmonology, where he spent most of his time in pulmonology and helping develop pulmonology as the new sub-specialty. At that time, infectious diseases was one of the last divisions to attain sub-speciality status and he assisted in the running of the infectious diseases ward, as well as the training of fellows in that discipline in the early days.

Prof. Feldman has also received the highest awards of each of these societies. He was recipient of the Presidential Award of the Critical

### Career advice pearls

Prof. Feldman recognises several factors that contributed substantially to his successful career in academic medicine and recommends the following to all aspiring academics:

- Find yourself a suitable mentor to advise you on how to go further
- Complete your own PhD so that you may supervise others who wish to do theirs
- Spend some time doing research in a successful research unit, preferably in an international centre
- Actively participate in both national and international society congresses and activities
- Collaborate widely within your discipline and across disciplines and with international units.

Care Society of Southern Africa in 2003 'in sincere appreciation of an outstanding contribution to critical care in Southern Africa.' In 2009, he was granted Honorary Membership of the Federation of Infectious Diseases Societies of Southern Africa (FIDSSA) 'on the grounds of significant national or international contributions to microbiology, virology, infectious diseases, travel medicine, infection control thereof and/or to the Federation.' In 2011, he was made an Honorary Life Member of FIDSSA for '... outstanding contribution to infectious diseases in South Africa, for ... tireless work as Editor of the *Southern African Journal of Epidemiology and Infection*, and to FIDSSA itself'.

Substantial contributions from Prof. Feldman to clinical service resulted in him receiving the FJ Milne Department of Internal Medicine, University of the Witwatersrand Service and Teaching award in 2010, and a 'Service Excellence Award' for outstanding clinical service by the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital in 2017.

**K Dheda, Editor-in-Chief**