

## AWARDS, HONOURS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- Honorary Doctorate in Medicine from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) for training in research techniques and ethics (2017)
- Distinguished Service Award from the International Association for Dental Research (2000)
- South Africa Medal (Gold) of the Southern Africa Association for the Advancement of Science (1999)

## DEFINING MOMENT

In 1972, the head of the Dental Research Institute managed to get him a British Council travel grant to the United Kingdom for three months, and spent time at the University of Bristol Dental School and their Medical Research Council research unit. From there he went on to the Radboud University at Nijmegen in the Netherlands. He had the typical South African syndrome where he thought that everybody working overseas were gods and we in South Africa didn't know anything. That three-month period made him realise that it is up to individuals to grow and develop their talents. He learned a lot about how to train people.

## WHAT PEOPLE MIGHT NOT KNOW

He has an interest in genealogy and has been tracing his multi-national family history for many years. "I am an 1820s settler descendant, and my French great-grandfather was the mining engineer at De Beers, in charge of digging the Big Hole. Cecil John Rhodes tried to bribe him to slow down the water seepage to let all the claims flood so he could buy them cheaply. In response my great-grandfather tried to push Rhodes into the Big Hole but was stopped by bystanders."

## INTEGRITY AND EXCELLENCE SAW CLEATON-JONES RISE TO THE TOP

Sometimes the smallest things can change the course of a man's life, or even the course of a university or a country. When Peter Cleaton-Jones received a travel grant for a three-month research visit to the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, he could never have predicted where it would lead him. The trip came in 1972 while he was completing his PhD in dentistry, and it rerouted the path his career and his life would take from that point.

"When I was doing my PhD, there was no training in how to plan a research study," says Cleaton-Jones. "On that trip I learned a lot about how to train people, so when I finished my PhD I started running a course at Wits on how to do research, presented by me and a colleague in the Dental Research Institute, Prof Elly Grossman."

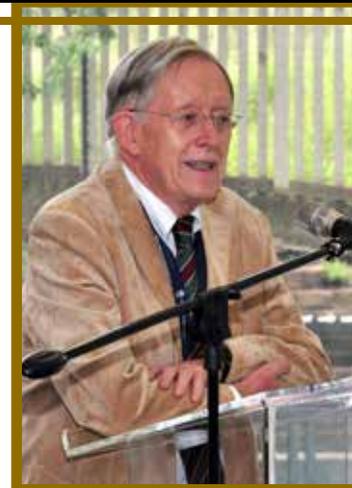
That course was the first of its kind at the Wits, where Cleaton-Jones was to spend the best part of his career, spanning more than 30 years and only coming to an end in 2010. He estimates that almost 2 000 researchers passed through that training programme, from undergraduates to internationally acclaimed researchers.

Another unforeseen consequence of that trip saw him become involved in health research ethics at Wits, thanks to the way he designed an anaesthesia study he wanted to conduct. "In 1974, I applied for ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee, and I had to answer their questions and debate the good and the bad of the study," says Cleaton-Jones. "Eventually they gave me permission to do it and a week later, the chair of the committee gave me a call. He said 'we don't get people here that think the way you do', and asked me to join the committee because of that application. I served on it until December 2017."

The 44 years on that committee, which included a period as Chair from 1985, as well as serving on the Research Ethics Committee of the South African Medical Research Council from 1990 to 2002, were years well spent for him. He started the Research Ethics Committee at the Human Sciences Research Council in 2003 and is still serving on that committee. In those posts he learned that integrity remains one of the most important qualities of his personal and professional life.

## REPUTATION A VITAL REALITY

"Whatever direction in life you decide to take, a vital reality is your reputation. It takes time to build a reputation but your reputation can be lost in an instant, perhaps forever. The word 'ethics' concerns morality, and I believe integrity that includes honesty and trustworthiness is a core of morality," he says.



# PETER CLEATON-JONES

Cleaton-Jones has pursued excellence in every walk of life from a very young age, not just in ethics.

His father, a Captain in the 3rd Transvaal Scottish Regiment, died after an operation in the Western Desert in 1941, without ever meeting young Peter. He was raised in Johannesburg by his mother and grandmother, who posed increasingly challenging reading tasks to him as a young child. "My grandmother would buy me a book and say 'when you can read these passages I just gave you, I will give you another book', and that worked," he explains. "Eventually I found that I wasn't looking at fiction at all, I was reading non-fiction, trying to understand science."

A visit to the dentist to have an abscess removed at the age of 12 impressed him greatly and set him on the road to studying dentistry after matriculating from Marist Brothers College in Observatory, Johannesburg (now the Sacred Heart College) in 1957. Five and a half years later he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in dental surgery, at the top of his class and winning all but two of the undergraduate prizes on offer at the time.

He was qualified but found that he did not want to go into private practice. "I decided in the last six months of my dentistry degree that I would not stay in dentistry because I found that I needed something further. I applied to go back to medical school to complete a medical degree as well."

Having worked for six months in the Orlando Clinic in Soweto as a dental officer during his undergraduate studies, he returned to Soweto to complete his medical internship at Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto in 1968, before joining the MRC/Wits Dental Research Institute to study further. It was during this time

that he completed his PhD and received his life-changing international travel grant, becoming Chief Research Officer at the Institute in 1973.

By 1977, he was Director of the Institute and Professor of Experimental Odontology. Under his leadership, the institute grew to include research into dental caries, dental epidemiology and anaesthesia, and he built research capacity and an international reputation for the Institute through the research training programme he developed.

His research at the time focused on anaesthesiology (dentists were the originators of general anaesthesia), as well as the epidemiology of dentistry, for instance the causes of tooth decay. "You will find that 20% of children get 80% of the dental decay," he says, and he wanted to know why.

Despite holding positions of leadership, conducting his own research and running training programmes, Cleaton-Jones still found time to pursue several more degrees throughout his career. On top of the Bachelor of Dental Surgery, MBChB and PhD, he was awarded two further doctoral degrees – a DSc (Dent) from Wits in 1991 and a PhD *Honoris causa* from the Medical University of South Africa (Medunsa, now the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University) in 2001. He also obtained a Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene and a Diploma in Public Health from Wits in order to learn about epidemiology and statistics. Finally, he completed a Diploma in Anaesthesia from the Colleges of Medicine in 1975 and was awarded a fellowship of the College of Dentistry *ad eundem* by the Colleges of Medicine in 2005.

Despite retiring more than a decade ago, Cleaton-Jones is still involved in ethics through the Steve Biko School of Bioethics at Wits, and remains an Emeritus Professor at the university where he has made his career and his impact.



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# Legends of South African Science II

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