

HONORARY GRADUATE

Jack Metz

When on 30 June 1990 Jack Metz retired from the post of Director of the South African Institute for Medical Research and as Chairman of the School of Pathology, he had been associated with the University for more than forty-four years.

He studied for his medical degree at Wits and served as a registrar in haematology, the subject in which he then specialised. In 1960 he was appointed Head of the Department and first Professor of Haematology. In 1974 he was appointed Deputy Director of the SAIMR and two years later became its Director. In the same year, he was elected Chairman of the School of Pathology, a joint venture between the University and the SAIMR.

During his dual term of office, the relationship between the Institute and the University was consolidated and it is now difficult to conceive of the one without the other. In addition to providing an excellent diagnostic service to academic hospitals, the School is the leading institution involved in training pathologists and technologists for the country and in teaching undergraduates in the Faculty of Health Sciences. Its research productivity is impressive. At a time when the future of academic medicine is unclear, the strength and resilience of the School of Pathology is a source of some comfort, thanks largely to the solid foundation laid by Metz.

Jack Metz served the University in many other ways: as Chairman of the Postgraduate Committee and the Allied Medical Discipline Committee and as a dedicated member of the Faculty's Executive Committee, the Medical and Dental Advisory Committee and many other bodies.

In the course of his splendid years of service to medicine, the University and the SAIMR, Jack Metz attained several academic and professional distinctions, including our degrees of Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Science in Medicine and election as a Fellow of four renowned scholarly colleges and societies, he being an FRCPath, FCAP, FRCPA and FRSSAF. In 1989 Professor Metz received the Order of Meritorious Service (Gold) for rendering exceptional service in the general public interest. His involvement included being Chairman of the Food Fortification Committee of the Medical Research Council; Chairman of the Life Sciences Committee of the Atomic Energy Board; and member of the Commission of Inquiry into Compensation for Occupational Diseases. The enthusiasm and thoroughness which Metz brings to every task he undertakes was recognised well beyond the confines of Wits.

Jack Metz's contributions to haematology in South Africa have been profound. While he is an authority in diseases of the blood generally, he focused most of his research interests over two decades on the topic of nutritional anaemia. In this field he published prolifically, and many of his over two hundred papers are still cited as seminal works. Anaemia ranks as one of the most prevalent of the afflictions of mankind. In Africa alone, some 150 million people, or over 40 per cent of the population, mainly women and children, are estimated to suffer from debilitating, energy-sapping effects of anaemia. The consequences are devastating, not only for the individual patient and family members but also for the community and the continental economy. The scope of Metz's work was such that his studies ranged from the broad community-orientated issues to the highly detailed biochemistry of megaloblastic anaemia. As a result of his work, it is clear that megaloblastic anaemia caused by a deficiency of folic acid can readily be prevented by the simple and affordable expedient of fortifying maize meal.

The effects of pregnancy, and even more so, those of prolonged lactation, on the development of folate-deficient megaloblastic anaemia were clearly shown by Metz and his colleagues to be major health risks of great relevance to the women of South Africa, particularly those in underprivileged groups.

Other research contributions made by Metz during his career included pioneering work on the distressing bleeding disorder, idiopathic thrombocytopenia purpura (ITP), and the closely related regional disorder known as Onyalai, which is characterised by distinct anaemia. As a morphologist and diagnostician generally, his reputation for making astute and definitive haematological diagnosis was legendary. Well versed as he was in the burgeoning technology available to the haematologist, the laboratories under his direction were always state of the art.

Under his superb leadership, the Department of Haematology, initially at the South African Institute of Medical Research and subsequently in the School of Pathology flourished. He was a charismatic and authoritative lecturer, with the capacity to inspire students and colleagues.

In recognition of his distinguished career in medical science, his efficient and inspiring leadership of the South African Institute for Medical Research and his service to the University in many capacities, as well as his important role in public affairs, the University takes pride in conferring on Jack Metz its highest accolade, the degree of Doctor of Science in Medicine, *honoris causa*.