

AWARDS, HONOURS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- Honorary Fellow, Colleges of Medicine of South Africa (2003)
- Honorary Professor, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Cape Town (UCT) (1994)
- Editor-in-Chief of the *South African Medical Journal*

DEFINING MOMENT

The twenty years that Professor Daniel Ncayiyana was the editor of the *South African Medical Journal* is one of the highlights of his career because he became involved in the world of medicine and medical research in South Africa. "For over 20 years I wrote editorials that influenced medical thinking in South Africa."

WHAT PEOPLE MIGHT NOT KNOW

"I have an obsession with flight and aircraft – I trained as a private pilot and learned to fly single engine planes."

DRIVEN TO CHANGE THE SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL LANDSCAPE

"As a young boy I wanted to be a train driver. All the boys in our area did. That's all we knew." Daniel Ncayiyana grew up in the post-war era near Port Shepstone, in what is now the south of KwaZulu-Natal. Those were hard days in a rural area with hardly anyone for a boy to look up to other than the occasional train driver. "Maize was the staple; milk was available in season and the occasional chicken or sheep would be eaten on festive occasions. Otherwise, for protein we trapped birds and collected large locusts and the flying ants that emerged in their thousands – seemingly from nowhere – after rain."

This all changed for Ncayiyana when a doctor started coming once a week to a local clinic set up by foreign missionaries in the area. This was most unusual at the time as no one, including Ncayiyana, had ever seen a black doctor before, or even thought it was possible for a black person to become a doctor. But Ncayiyana was determined to follow in that doctor's footsteps. His first attempt to train as a doctor in the 1960s was cut short during his third year at the then University of Natal Medical School in Durban (now part of the

University of KwaZulu-Natal): He was forced to go into exile on account of his anti-apartheid activities. "It was a time when resistance to the apartheid regime was really strong, when the movements were the strongest," he says.

Shortly after he joined the Pan-Africanist Congress, the party was banned and he became active underground as its General Secretary. When police caught wind of his political activities he was arrested and jailed for six months; when he was released he fled the country, going into exile in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. "That was a very significant time in my life story because until my exile I was a medical student heading towards becoming a doctor; suddenly all my dreams were falling apart," he says.

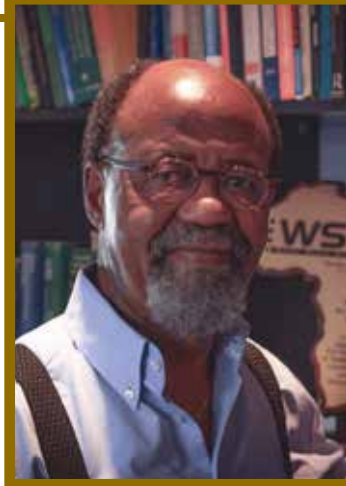
CONTINUING A DREAM

However, all that changed when he received a scholarship to study medicine at the University of Groningen Medical School in the Netherlands, where he graduated as a licensed medical doctor in 1970. "I was able to continue my dream of becoming a doctor, thanks to that scholarship."

He went on to postgraduate training in obstetrics and gynaecology at the New York University School of Medicine and practiced in Seattle as a specialist obstetrician and gynaecologist for 15 years.

"I returned to work in the Transkei in 1986, because at that time it was more or less independent of South Africa. I was banned in South Africa," he says. During his time at the University of Transkei Medical School, now part of the Walter Sisulu University, he pioneered the problem-based learning and community-oriented curriculum which has now been adopted to train health professionals by virtually all universities in South Africa. He was instrumental in establishing the University of Transkei Medical School, today known as the Walter Sisulu Medical School, where he acted as Vice-Chancellor for three years. "I worked in the Transkei until 1990, when President Nelson Mandela came out of prison and we had freedom to move in South Africa."

"My third career change came when I applied to be Editor of the *South African Medical Journal*, and this is perhaps the period in my career that had the most





impact," says Ncayiyana. As editor, he was responsible for selecting the articles that would be published and this meant he became quite influential in the world of medicine and medical research in South Africa.

It was not an easy appointment, however, as the remnants of apartheid still permeated the industry in 1993, a year before South Africa's first democratic elections. "Although I quickly emerged as the most qualified candidate, it took three interviews to appoint me as the first black editor. The excuse for dilly-dallying was that I did not speak Afrikaans (although neither did my British predecessor), but we all privately understood that it was my complexion – and the politics that came with it – that was the problem."

He later became involved in higher education management and governance, even co-authoring a book with Fred Hayward – *Effective Governance: A Guide for Council Members of Universities and Technikons* (1999) – which has become a standard reference for universities in South Africa.

Perhaps the most important contribution he has made in higher education in South Africa was helping to create the Durban University of Technology (DUT). "We merged the Technikon Natal, a previously white institution, with the ML Sultan Technical, which was a black institution, to form the Durban University of Technology." Ncayiyana became the founding Vice-Chancellor of DUT in 2001.

He was an Associate Researcher and Principal Investigator for the HSRC, and chaired the South African Advisory Committee of the Medical Protection Society. He is currently an independent consultant in medical education and training and has served as a consultant to universities in Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria and The Gambia, among others, funded by international agencies including the World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Ford Foundation.

He may not have ended up driving the trains of his boyhood ideals, but he has certainly driven change, having attained his goal to become a doctor through what he calls "a series of fortuitous and seemingly miraculous events".

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Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf)

Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf)

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