



Obituary

The passing of Pravin Gordhan

The PSSA was saddened to learn of Pravin Gordhan's passing on Friday, 13 September 2024. Even though he hasn't been a practising pharmacist for many years, he is proof of pharmacists' versatility and what can be achieved if one sets one's mind to it. We have collected messages from a few fellow pharmacists who knew him as a student or a practising pharmacist.

Obituary: Pravin Gordhan – pharmacist, activist, administrator, political leader

12 April 1949 - 13 September 2024

Mr Pravin Gordhan passed away on 13 September 2024, aged 75, after a short battle with cancer. Known widely and affectionately as "Mr PG," he obtained his Bachelor of Pharmacy degree at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) in 1973 and completed his internship at the then King Edward VIII Hospital (now Victoria Mxenge Hospital).

It was in his years of hospital pharmacy practice that "Mr PG" first established his presence as an inspiring political guide to a generation of young students at the University of Natal Medical School. Many still recall their visits to the Pharmacy Department, and the seminal role this exposure had in their maturing political awareness and engagement. In 1981, Pravin Gordhan's employment was terminated and he then opened a community pharmacy in Durban's "Casbah". Organised pharmacy failed one of its own at this point, refusing to stand by a call that he either be charged or released from detention. That failure led to a schism in hospital pharmacy structures that took many years to be repaired. In these years, he was subject to repeated detention and banning orders.

Pravin Gordhan was integrally involved in the formation of civil society structures, such as the Durban Housing Action Committee, which were to coalesce as the United Democratic Front (UDF). Former Minister Trevor Manuel has recalled that "In many ways, the ideas behind the UDF were born on the balcony of Pravin's flat in Edward Street".

After serving as chairperson of the multiparty negotiations, the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), he entered parliament in the first democratic administration in 1994. He was the chair of the Portfolio Committee on Constitutional Development, Provincial Affairs and Local Government, steering the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic in 1996. Apart from a stint as a transformative Commissioner of the South African Revenue Service,

he also served as Minister of Finance (twice), Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, and lastly, as Minister of Public Enterprises.

However, it was his highly principled stance against State Capture, his call for South Africans to "join the dots", that ensured his enduring reputation. As President Ramaphosa put it: "We have lost an outstanding leader whose unassuming persona belied the depth of intellect, integrity and energy with which he undertook his activism, his duty as a parliamentarian and his roles as a member of Cabinet." He added: "as a beacon of our fight against corruption, Pravin Gordhan stood up to derision and threats emanating from some in our nation who were scorched by his insistence that justice be dispensed against those who sought to undermine our democracy and raid our public resources and assets."

Although Pravin Gordhan did not practise as a pharmacist for many years, the profession was proud, eventually, to claim him as one of their own. In his address to the 2016 SA Pharmacy Council National Pioneer Pharmacy Awards he touched on issues of corruption and social justice, but also the pivotal role of the profession in the delivery of healthcare. He noted that: "*We have to find new ways of ensuring not only better access to medicines, but more effective ways of people accessing medicines, including chronic medicines, without going through burdensome queues. There is much to be done to ensure that civil servants become real public servants.*"

In a final address for the 130th anniversary of the founding of the Natal Indian Congress, drafted from his hospital bed, Pravin Gordhan called for a "reset". He sets us a task: "*Let us open a new chapter on united, progressive, mass mobilisation and campaigning which builds national unity, social cohesion and a new optimism and determination to build a better South Africa.*"

As South Africa strives to deliver universal health coverage, we would do well to reflect on the lessons Pravin Gordhan provided, of a life of service, of enduring principled stances, based on deeply held convictions, of humility and commitment, of bravery. In his own final words: *"I have no regrets, no regrets... We have made our contribution."*

Message from Prof Vassie Naidoo

I knew Pravin Gordhan (PG) from the UDW.

They were the first batch of students that enrolled for the B. Pharm (4-year course) degree. PG was a few years ahead of me.

I got to know him well during the 1972 student uprisings. He was amongst a few of the other BSc Pharm students who were instrumental in teaching me about politics, the right to a fair and just society irrespective of colour, creed and religion. It was the start of the Black Conscious Movement—the Steve Biko era. We had learnt from these senior students that nothing comes without a sacrifice.

We had to make decisions that would benefit society as a whole and not just a handful of people.

So, at the tender age of 18, I cut my teeth into politics and became an activist on campus. Subsequent to my completing my degree, I was active in community activism, especially in the 1980's.

Pravin was very involved in the Chatsworth Housing Action Committee – uplifting the lives of the poor and downtrodden.

I want to end by thanking the SAPC during the presidency of Prof Mano Chetty and I also on SAPC at the time where it was decided that we send him a letter of apology for the wrong of the past in striking him off the SAPC register.

In 1994, when democracy reigned, he was invited to speak at PSSA KZN Coastal Branch, I also attended. He called me aside and told me that I should get involved with the PSSA. *(At the time I was only involved with Pharmaguild South, a group of community pharmacists mostly from Chatsworth and surrounding areas that got together to form a community pharmacist association with the view to approach stakeholders such as medical aids etc. to better improve community pharmacy.)*

That was when I became involved in the PSSA. I went on to become its first woman chairperson, served on the National Executive and became a Fellow of the PSSA. It was PG's insistence and guidance that I got involved.

An amazing person, incorruptible, steadfast in his views, resilient and a pharmacist. I feel proud to have been mentored by him.

Message from Lallie Moodley

My friendship with Pravin Gordhan began in 1969 at the University on Salisbury Island (known as Bush College), where we enrolled for B Pharmacy. In our first year, the male students were forced to wear ties every day, and this was the first time when I realised how he could mobilise with ease. He encouraged us females to support the

males in a walk out of the lecture room and we refused to return until the rector reversed his decision. That was the beginning of a special relationship that we shared for 55 years.

In 1972, we were moved to UDW, and we had many protests. Pravin played a major role in changing the attitude of management towards the plight of students. Many of us did not attend the graduation ceremony of a "tribal" college, so after 1994, a special graduation was held for us.

We then started work at King Edward VIII Hospital (KEH) as interns and tried to learn as much as possible to improve service to patients. Pravin was very community-oriented, so he made sure that we trained the nurses in the wards with regard to tidiness of medicine cupboards and expiry dates, etc. We also had a good relationship with the doctors regarding advice on drugs. Pravin did not take anything lightly and always had questions. He was always willing to learn and to teach. He became very active politically in the 70's, always fighting for the rights of the underprivileged. He worked at the hospital until his arrest in the 80's. After his release, he was not taken back into employment at KEH. A fellow pharmacist offered him employment at Central Pharmacy in Smith Street.

Thereafter he decided to open a Pharmacy in Prince Edward Street, Durban. He was watched by the authorities, so I helped out whenever I could because he was always at meetings, sometimes held at the back of the pharmacy.

He then encouraged me to open a retail pharmacy which I did with much assistance from him even to the extent of designing the pharmacy and the business cards, stamps etc. He was truly an amazing individual, able to divide his attention between pharmacy and all the other ideas he had for the country and still be efficient and not complain.

During operation Vula, he had to be in hiding so we offered him and the late Billy Nair a safe place in our house. Pravin was referred to as my cousin, "Uncle Dan" to everyone. My daughters learnt a lot from him at that time.

When I relocated to Pretoria he welcomed me to stay with him and his family and was very upset when I was ready to move on my own. That's the type of person he was. My husband, daughters and I are forever indebted to him for always caring about me and guiding me. Pravin will sadly be missed by my family.

Message from Sathia Padayachee

I worked with Pravin in 1981 at KEH in Durban. Pravin was a senior pharmacist and I had just completed my internship the year before and was just a junior pharmacist. He was an incredible human being working selflessly for our freedom and democracy. He has inspired so many lives and spread joy amongst all of us. From pharmacists to labourers to cleaners, all were equal in his eyes. May you rest in internal peace. RIP, Pravin Gordhan.

Message from Barry Kirtnasamy

I fondly remember Pravin at King Edward Hospital Pharmacy and his mentoring of us as medical students with Noddy Jinabhai. It was the early days of our formative years as young activists. Later in life a beacon of hope for our democracy and a better life for all despite his detention and torture under the regime and later to stand tall in defending us against State Capture. Humble to the end and never let the high office take him away from the grassroots activists. May his soul rest in peace and condolences to his family and all comrades who shared personal moments with one of the greatest sons of the struggle.

Message from the PSSA President – Tshifhiwa Rabali

As President of the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa (PSSA) and on behalf of the pharmacy profession, I would like to send my sincere condolences to his family and friends. As pharmacists, we always felt represented by him at the highest echelon of the government of South Africa. May his soul rest in eternal peace.