



Obituary

Professor Robert Stanley Summers

30 March 1940 – 22 September 2025

A tribute to a remarkable academic and a life well lived

Robert Stanley Summers, an Emeritus Professor of Pharmacy at the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, formerly the Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA) and known to all as 'Prof Rob Summers', died peacefully at his home on the morning of 22 September 2025. He is survived by his wife Prof Beverley Summers, his three sons Neil, Andrew and Matthew, his daughter, Kate, and five grandchildren, all of whom he adored.

Prof Summers matriculated in Zimbabwe and obtained his bachelor's and master's degrees in pharmacy at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, followed by his PhD from the University of Bradford. He was the Head of the School of Pharmacy at MEDUNSA, which he founded in 1983, for over 20 years. He was the Pharmacy Training and Development Project Manager, Chair of the Faculty of Medicine's Higher Degrees Committee, member of various combined university and hospital committees, and the Medunsa Campus Merger Manager during the merger of MEDUNSA with the University of the North to form the University of Limpopo.

His life-long dedication to the pharmacy profession and pharmacists is known to all, being consulted nationally and internationally for his expertise in the fields of health and pharmaceutical services management. He chaired or vice-chaired a number of provincial and national committees, including the National Essential Drugs List Committees for Primary Health Care and for Hospitals. He advised the National Department of Health on matters relevant to registration, production, procurement and distribution, and overall management of pharmaceuticals, particularly during the period of implementation of the South African Drug Action Programme. A little-known fact is that he made an important contribution to the finalisation of the National Drug Policy in 1995, before its launch in 1996. He was also a player on the international stage, bringing the WHO-INRUD indicator methodology to the country and applying it in the public sector. His contribution to the WHO guide 'Developing pharmacy practice: A focus on patient care' is also noteworthy.

Prof Summers was a remarkable academic and well-known for his leadership role in pharmaceutical education and training. He directed, co-directed and/or contributed substantially to many national and international short courses. Of significance during the



HIV/AIDS era, was his role in the development, implementation and evaluation of training programmes, treatment adherence studies and pharmacovigilance. He also directed a number of provincial and national pharmaceutical operational research projects.

Prof Summers spent his career making a substantial contribution to clinical pharmacy and pharmaceutical services at a national level in South Africa. Throughout his career he was greatly loved as a teacher, a researcher, a supervisor, a mentor, and a life coach. In the words of Dr Andy Gray, 'Professor Summers was truly an 'eminence grise' in the clinical pharmacy arena. Many leading clinical pharmacists first cut their teeth in the previous MEDUNSA clinical pharmacy training programmes'. His work with the Department of Health contributed to strengthening systems and providing many pharmacists with the opportunity to grow their practices, develop critical research skills and implement rational medicines use interventions at scale. Prof Summers supervised and shaped the careers of numerous master's and doctoral degree candidates, who subsequently built successful careers in pharmaceutical services and clinical pharmacy, making a difference as leaders in the pharmacy profession. He has published and presented nationally and internationally over 400 research papers, full research reports, academic articles, books and book chapters.

Prof Summers was a remarkable pharmacist and leader whose unwavering dedication to the profession of pharmacy left a permanent mark on all who had the privilege of getting to know him and to work with him. He was considered a role model, mentor and tutor for many pharmacists. He was a very methodical professional, illustrated by some of his common phrases/quotes, *"Write it down, if it hasn't been recorded it didn't happen"*; *"Always proof-read what you have done"*; *"Who, How, Where, When, What"*; and *"Do what you say what you are going to do and see it through to the end"*.

Prof Summers lived a life of determination and an outstanding ability to lead and motivate people to always do good to others. In 2007 he was the guest speaker at the BPharm Oath-taking and shared two life lessons with the audience. The first was to deal with the circumstances we face and find the opportunities in them; use your skills and knowledge and those tools to benefit those around you. The other was *"Don't shovel dirt onto others. They may end up using your bad intentions to their own advantage"*. He was a visionary leader who believed in people and led with quiet strength. He was the epitome of Nelson Mandela's description: "A leader is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind." However, Prof Summers' leadership style also illustrated the importance of a balanced strategy in which the leader must sometimes move out ahead of the flock and take a bold, new direction.

Prof Summers passionately served his profession as a member of the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa (PSSA) and the South African Association of Hospital and Institutional Pharmacists (SAAHIP) since 1965, and as a founder Member of the Academy of Pharmaceutical Sciences (APSSA). He served the society in many capacities, especially the Northern Gauteng Branch of SAAHIP where he served as chairman and a committee member for many years. He played an important role in building the academic rigour of the SAAHIP Conference over the years, being one of the members who would often 'lead the way' with regard to protocol and ethics. In 1986 he was awarded Fellowship of the PSSA in recognition for his exceptional and consistent service in promoting the profession of pharmacy; and in 2018 he received an award of appreciation from the SAAHIP Northern Gauteng branch for exceptional and consistent involvement and significant contribution to the branch's activities, development and promotion. Furthermore, he was also a founder member and then Honorary Life Member of the Society of Cosmetic Chemists of South Africa.

In addition to his passion for health and pharmaceutical services, Prof Summers lived life to the fullest and was a devoted and caring family man, building strong family bonds. Outside of his pharmacy work, he found joy in spending time with his family in nature, serving as an elder in the church, reading widely, travelling, walking and keeping fit, enjoying jazz music and good food. Prof Summers' legacy will live on forever, reminding us that we control our attitudes and we choose to live a life of meaningful acts of love and service.

Hannelie Meyer