



Obituary

Donald George Sutherland 1939 – 2018

Doug Gordon FPS

On 8 December 2018 our colleague and good friend, Don Sutherland passed away and the profession lost another great leader who will be sadly missed.

Don was born in Krugersdorp on 18 March 1939, spent his early years in Johannesburg, but moved to Durban where he matriculated at Northland Boys High School in 1956. He then went on to study pharmacy at the local Technicon and qualified as a pharmacist in 1961.

He immediately became involved in so-called organised pharmacy politics and was elected to the Natal Coastal Branch Committee in 1963. He was immediately elected to the Board of the Branch owned Durban Chemists Medicine Depots (Pty) Ltd. – a company that provided after hours pharmaceutical services to both the pharmacists and the people of Durban. The following year he was elected as the Chairman of the Board of that company and held the position for the next 14 years.

I met Don for the first time in January 1968 when he handed me my letter of appointment as the first fulltime manager of one of the four pharmacies operated by the company and he immediately became my colleague, friend and mentor. This relationship lasted right up to his sad passing in December last year. I feel extremely fortunate to have been guided by Don whose vision and willingness to take on the responsibility associated with creating change was, at times, both frightening and exhilarating.

Don's rapid advance in the PSSA hierarchy was not surprising and in 1977 he was elected to the National Executive Committee and served on that committee for ten years. He was elected as Vice President of the Society in 1980 and served a record four terms as President, firstly in 1981, then again in 1982, 1983 and 1985 which is testimony to the extremely high esteem in which he was held by his peers. During this time, he, together with Andre Spier, conducted Syncom 1 and 2, - a research project into the role of pharmaceutical services in this country which never really saw the light of day, - probably because it was years in advance of its time and not readily accepted or understood by everyone at the time.

Don had an interesting and varied pharmacy career receiving recognition all along the way.

He was awarded the Pharmacist of the Year Management Award

in 1982.

He served as one of five members on the committee commissioned by the Department of Health to investigate Privatization of Health in SA.

Don was also the first Chairman of the Health Strategy Association of SA (HSA).

In 1988 he was elected to serve on the South African Pharmacy Council and did so for five years. During this time, he was the Vice President of the Council and the Chairman of the Strategic Planning Committee of the Council.

Don's business accomplishments were impressive. As mentioned, he served as Chairman of the Board of the Durban Chemists Medicine Depots for 14 years.

He was a Shareholder and a Director of the Board of Natal Wholesale Chemists.

In the early 70's Don established D.G. Sutherland and Associates (Pty) Ltd. and developed this company into a group of five pharmacies trading as Pharmicare. He introduced the first nursing service into pharmacy in this country in 1980 and sold the concept as well as the name Pharmicare to SA Druggists in 1985 and acted as a consultant to SAD until 1994.

Don was Managing Director of Community Clinics (Pty) Ltd., a company initially created to develop clinics for blue collar workers, but was converted to a pharmaceuticals and surgical products distribution company which was later purchased by Stratmed (Pty) Ltd.

He was the Pharmacy Director of the Medicross Healthcare Group from 1997 to 2000 and in 2001 joined Scriptpharm Holdings (Pty) Ltd where he held the position of Chief Executive. During this time, he was instrumental in the formation of various companies within the group.

Don retired in December 2010 after a truly varied and illustrious career in pharmacy.

As a friend of long standing, I knew Don as a very caring individual. He cared about his family, his friends and his profession.

He was well known for his boundless energy – he was always on the go and at times it was difficult to keep up with him, but he inspired one to keep on trying.

Don also had a great sense of humour and loved a good joke – so much so that he was fairly well known for telling you the same joke more than once. I guess he thought that a good joke deserved more than one telling.

He was a real people person and a good “go to” man whenever you felt the need to share a problem. Somehow, simply discussing it with him seemed to help.

In recent years, when his health started to fail, he displayed the same tenacity in dealing with the health problems that he had shown earlier in his business and professional life when things were not going as planned.

Don was an inspiration to many. I have lost my mentor and friend of fifty years; his wife, Joyce and the family have lost a loving and caring husband and father that they adored, and pharmacy has lost a great leader.

May he rest in peace.

Tribute to Donald Sutherland

Natie Finkelstein

I was deeply saddened by the news of Don Sutherland's demise. Whilst I was aware of his poor quality of health, one is never quite prepared when the inevitable occurs. I mourn his passing, as we had known each other since our days in student pharmaceutical 'politics'.

I had the privilege of serving on the SA Pharmacy Council when Don was the Vice-President of that statutory body. He was always a sound thinker, astute debater and his role in Syncom and other research projects into the role of pharmaceutical services have long since faded into the mists of time. Don was also a pioneer in that he introduced the first nursing service into pharmacy, a novel development which was soon acquired by SA Druggists Ltd and introduced into certain Link pharmacies, and has become firmly entrenched within many community pharmacies in South Africa.

I had the privilege of taking Don, Joyce and his family around Kirstenbosch earlier this year at Don's request. Although he managed to walk with difficulty, such was his determination that he kept up with me guiding them. He was so appreciative that he joined me again as another group was escorted round the garden. We were in telephone contact and spoke to each other periodically recalling with nostalgia some or other highlight during our professional lives. I was also happy to see him and Boet van der Merwe at our last Fellows Dinner – a very pleasant reunion!

Suffice it to say that another mighty cedar has fallen in the pharmaceutical profession. He will be sadly missed and may his dear soul rest in peace.