



## LEST WE FORGET

### Keith Gerson

1927–2019



Keith Gerson, a dedicated pharmacist, enjoyed a long and varied career in his chosen profession. He was passionate about pharmacy, and his demeanour was professional at all times. He spent most of his career serving the professional bodies to which he belonged.

Keith matriculated at Durban High School in 1943, at 16 years of age, with no definite ideas as to a career. For advice, his father turned to a friend, Eric Seymour, a well-known and respected Durban pharmacist. This advice, which included the virtues of pharmacy as a profession, led to Keith's being apprenticed to Mr L A Ball, who owned a pharmacy in Umbilo Road. Mr Ball was also the dispensing examiner for the South African Pharmacy Board (SAPB) examinations. He was an excellent teacher and he placed Keith firmly on the road to the highest standards of professionalism.

After completing his three-year apprenticeship, he studied full time at Durban Pharmacy School and passed his final examinations in December 1947. However, he could only register with the SAPB to practise in South Africa on 5 April 1948, the day he celebrated his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

Once registered, his first position was that of a regular grade pharmacist with State Health at King George V Hospital, Durban, with Pat Bailey as Chief Pharmacist. After two years he resigned and joined Pharmaceutical Manufacturing S.A. Pty Ltd in Durban as assistant pharmacist, which introduced him to manufacturing pharmacy. That same year he was appointed Managing Director, quite an achievement for a 22-year-old! This position provided great opportunities as the company was part of the South African branch of Fassett & Johnson, a British Company with world-wide interests in pharmaceutical distribution and manufacturing. Keith was specially trained in cosmetic manufacturing at top level by the Chief Chemist of Innox Ltd, a company that was represented by Fassett and Johnson.

Sadly Fassett & Johnson closed their South African operation in 1957 and, as there were no equivalent opportunities in Durban, Keith looked elsewhere and found a position in Johannesburg at British Medical Laboratories, the manufacturers of "Dr Mackenzie's Veinoids" and other products.

When Crowden Products, the company that had purchased the manufacturing plant from Fassett & Johnson, offered him the position of Managing Director PMSA, he was delighted. He accepted the offer and went on to enjoy a very happy and productive time with them.

However, concerns about his future, and disenchantment with life in Johannesburg, prompted him to contact a life-long pharmacist friend who owned a pharmacy in Durban. This wanted to dispose of his business, so arrangements were made for Keith to take over as manager in 1960, with the option to purchase. It was soon his, and the business thrived with Keith as owner.

In 1976 he was approached with an offer to close his pharmacy and to merge with the Peoples Chemist Group whose main pharmacy was in the same area. He was made manager of this main branch and after about 2 years he was asked to transfer to the Westville branch to sort out problems that had surfaced. Within a year he had succeeded in turning the business around.

By 1980 he was considering hospital pharmacy again and was offered a level 1 pharmacist post at Wentworth Hospital where he subsequently worked for 4 years. In 1985 he applied for, and was appointed to, a position as a Senior Pharmacist post at the head office in Pietermaritzburg. Keith relished this work at head office, as he had a flair for administrative work and report writing. However, in 1988 he was transferred to Northdale Hospital, Pietermaritzburg, where he was appointed Deputy Head of the Pharmacy Department, and there he remained until he retired in April 1992.

Being one of those pharmacists who cannot relinquish their profession, he continued working in temporary posts in various hospitals in Pietermaritzburg until he retired permanently in 2011.

In his spare time, Keith was also active as a member of the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa. Like many pharmacists in those days, Keith recognised that he had joined a profession, and that part of being a professional is membership of the professional organisation that represents and serves one's fellow professionals. After registering with the Pharmacy Board, he immediately joined the Pharmaceutical Society (PSSA) Natal Coastal Branch and he was invited to join their "Entertainment Committee". His first activity was to promote the branch activities, and he was soon made chairman of this committee that was responsible for promoting social activities within the branch. Soon he was elected to the Natal Coastal Branch Committee and in 1957 he was elected Chairman of the Branch. It was a great honour for one so young, and especially as he was not a retail pharmacist, being employed at a pharmaceutical manufacturing company as managing director. In 1967 he was again elected as Chairman.

On 20 May 1991, at the PSSA Annual Conference, he was made a Fellow of the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa in recognition of his long and meritorious service to the pharmacy profession. He was elected to the Executive Committee of the PSSA on which body he served for some years, rising to Vice President. He was also elected chairman of the Natal Branch of the retailers' association for 1968–1969.

When Keith switched to the hospital sector, he wasted no time in becoming involved with SAAHIP. He served on the Natal Coastal Branch committee from 1982 until he was transferred to Pietermaritzburg in 1985, where he promptly became active in the KwaZulu-Natal Inland Branch. He was chairman of the branch from 1986 to 1991. I was privileged to serve on committees with Keith both in the KwaZulu-Natal Coastal Branch and the KwaZulu-Natal Inland Branch of SAAHIP.

Despite his busy life as a pharmacist, Keith found time to participate in the two sports he loved: yachting and model yachting.

He was a member of the Point Yacht Club in Durban and the Henley Midmar Yacht Club. He was able to handle various classes of yachts. He was made an Honorary Life Member of the Midmar Yacht Club. He was also a member of the Durban Model Yacht Club, and his expertise in this sport earned him his Natal Colours as well as his Springbok Colours.

Keith Gerson is survived by his beloved wife, Lynette, a son, and two daughters.

**Susan Buekes**