



# Obituary

## Professor Viness Pillay (1970–2020)

Yahya Choonara

The University of the Witwatersrand extends its deepest condolences to the colleagues, friends and family of a leading Pharmaceutical Sciences researcher and academic, Professor Viness Pillay, who passed away peacefully on the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020 after a lengthy illness. He was just four days away from his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.



*Prof. Viness Pillay*

A Personal Professor of Pharmaceutics, Prof. Pillay held the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) - National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa Research Chair in “Pharmaceutical Biomaterials and Polymer-Engineered Drug Delivery Technologies” and also served as the Founding Director of the Wits Advanced Drug Delivery Platform (WADDP) Research Unit for more than two decades.

The WADDP has become the heart of advanced drug delivery and pharmaceutical sciences research in South Africa. As an erudite, when he named the research unit he emphasised the word “Platform” and this has indeed been a launching pad for over 120 WADDP Alumni who are professionals placed in various positions in South Africa and abroad.

Prof. Pillay spent his career making a substantial contribution to pharmaceutical sciences research. His work transcended in producing several inventions in the design of advanced drug delivery systems, biomaterials, nanomedicines and de-novo tissue engineering and bio-inks for 3D-printing.

He had an outstanding insight and ability to identify important therapeutic challenges and present research results that questioned conventional wisdom. This led him to developing several inventions including the world’s fastest dissolving matrix for the

onset of rapid drug action in the human body, a neural device for therapeutic intervention in spinal cord injury and novel wound-healing technologies. He has also pioneered numerous molecular modelling paradigms as a first-in-the-field of pharmaceutics including his very own PEiGORTeory – Pillay’s Electro-influenced Geometrical Organization-Reorganization Theory published in the International Journal of Pharmaceutics.

His research was always at the forefront and led him to publish more than 300 research articles in ISI-accredited international journals, 45 book chapters, editor of 2 books and 21 granted patents. He was also the recipient of numerous prestigious national and international accolades.

Capacity development and transformation played a central role in the work of Prof. Pillay, so much so that he has developed the largest cohort of talent in the pharmaceutical sciences in South Africa. In 2019 he received the prestigious NRF Award as the Champion of Research Capacity Development and Transformation at Public Science and Higher Education Institutions in South Africa. This was a fitting testament to his servant heart that always spoke to doing what was right and what was good for people – a living motto of, “the world can always use one more kind and compassionate person”. He had a brilliant poise of producing not only great science, but scientists too.

Throughout his career Prof. Pillay was greatly loved as an influential researcher, teacher, prodigy, friend, mentor, life coach, supervisor and confidant of more than 120 postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows from nine different countries as well as colleagues and friends from around the world. He loved to love people and this was strongly felt by his students who have gone on to successful careers making a difference as leaders in some of the world’s best-run pharmaceutical companies, academic institutions and research organisations.

Wits University and the world has lost a remarkable professor, cherished academic, a prolific researcher, an icon of innovation who changed our world for the better. He was a trailblazer and achieved the highest ranks in scholarship and in friendship and left a formidable legacy in his field through his work and his interaction with people. He rarely remained still and was always working on the next big idea. The world has been changed by his work and personality; a claim that not many can make.

A multitude of friends worldwide are left behind but his work continues through these same colleagues and friends, as well as his former students.

His work brought together outstanding individuals from many different academic disciplines and is an inspiration to his students and colleagues. In addition to using his powerful intellect, creativity and communication skills to make research contributions, he has used these gifts to also bring about new thinking and models of cohort mentorship and team-based research. He created science, synthesised ideas, provided and challenged viewpoints, developed careers, redefined pharmaceutical innovation, garnered accolades, and above all, made researchers – all with an unshakeable attitude and indomitable humility.

His passing has left a huge void. A void for his current and past students who he mentored and cared about the most; a void for the WADDP Team and the Department of Pharmacy and Pharmacology at Wits where he firmly established a research

structure and culture of innovation; a void for the School of Therapeutic Sciences where his distinguished scholarly contribution raised the research and academic profile within the therapeutic sciences; a void for the Wits Faculty of Health Sciences where he articulated his viewpoint at various forums and contributed immensely to the upward trajectory of the Faculty's research agenda; a void for Wits for he made Wits synonymous with Pharmaceutical Research; and an unfillable void in the personal lives of all those who had the privilege of interacting with him.

A visionary, a giant of science, a truly wonderful person, gone too soon. His colossal knowledge, inspirational leadership and legacy has made a positive impact on all those who knew him and will always be carried forward to ease such a great loss and pain.

Prof. Pillay is survived by his wife Ishara, their beautiful daughter Nikayla and all those he loved and touched deeply personally and professionally.

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## Professor Indres Moodley

Professor Indres Moodley passed away recently at the age of 75. He was a student at the University College for Indians that was built on Salisbury Island, Port of Durban, and which was replaced by the University of Durban-Westville. He became a lecturer in the Science Faculty, which covered Pharmacy and Science programmes.

In the so-called "Essop Trial" (June – November 1972), Indres (then 27) alongside Mohammed Salim Essop (22 – who was earlier detained with Ahmed Timol), Amina Desai (52), and Yusuf Hassem Essack (21) were indicted under the Terrorism Act, and on three alternative charges under the Suppression of Communism Act. He was represented by Advocate Ismail Mohamed (later to be Judge-President of the Constitutional Court). He was sentenced to five years' imprisonment. Indres appealed against his conviction and sentences. His appeal was upheld by the Appellate Division in Bloemfontein, on 28 September, 1973.

Indres later went to London, where he pursued a Masters and a Doctorate at University College London (UCL). He returned in the early 1990s to become Chair and Head of Department of Pharmacy at Wits Medical School for five years. Thereafter he became the Director of Health Economics at the Pharmacia Corporation, South Africa.

In the early 2000s, he joined the University of Natal (later UKZN) Medical School as Professor of Public Health as well as the Director of the Health Outcomes Research Unit in the Department of Public Health at the NR Mandela School of Medicine, UKZN.

Prof. Moodley served on the South African Pharmacy Council, the Minister of Health's Pharmaceutical Pricing Committee and the Board of the Medical Research Council (MRC).