

DIVISION OF OTORHINOLARYNGOLOGY

The Division of Otorhinolaryngology was established in 1956 in the hospital named after Dr Karl Bremer, who was himself an ear, nose and throat specialist who had formerly practiced in Cape Town.

As was the case with all the other divisions, the ENT division had quite humble beginnings with part-time staff as its only resource. The first head, Dr Harry Wykerd, was a part-timer who practiced in Cape Town and he was assisted in the beginning by Dr Jack de Villiers, another private specialist from Cape Town.

Professor Carel du Toit was the first full-time head. He was appointed in 1973 and retired from the post in 1981. The first Registrar in the Division, Dr P.Olivier, later settled in Port Elizabeth and he was followed in 1961 by Dr PK de Villiers. The latter later became the head of ENT at the State Hospital in Windhoek, Namibia. The third Registrar was Dr Johnny Nell who completed his training under Prof Carel du Toit and later joined the practice of Prof Du Toit which, interestingly, was also the former practice of Dr Karl Bremer. Dr Nell was the first ENT specialist in the Northern suburbs of Cape Town.



Prof Carl du Toit, first Head, 1973 – 1981

Ahead of his time, Professor Carel du Toit had the vision to start a programme for hearing impaired children to develop their residual hearing to enable them to develop spoken language and enter mainstream education. He undertook several study trips overseas to acquire information to develop a model for such a programme. He was influenced by the work of Edith Whetnall in the UK, Dr Roskjawer in Denmark and especially by the Central Institute for the Deaf in Missouri, USA. In order to achieve this, he had special training organized overseas for three individuals, viz. Lida Müller, Frikkie van Zyl and Izelle Heunis. Together they started the Hearing and Speech Clinic at Tygerberg Hospital where hearing impaired children and adults were seen. The Paedo-Audiology Unit was developed under Mr Frikkie Van Zyl as part of this Clinic and it established an early screening programme in the Cape Province that was conducted by public health nurses. Most significantly, Professor Du Toit started the pre-school for hearing impaired children at Tygerberg Hospital which was later, in 1986, was named after him. The children at the school were trained in the auditory-oral method to facilitate spoken language development. Izelle Heunis was the first teacher and she set up a parent guidance programme. The posts for the teachers at this school were jointly funded by the Health and Education Departments. Prof Du Toit was also instrumental in setting up the Acoustic Laboratory, under Prof Guelke, and this laboratory focused on research into the physiology of hearing and in fitting and maintaining hearing aids.

Prof Derrick Wagenfeld (1982 - 1987) was the next head and he had the foresight to establish, in association with Mrs Lida Müller, the First Cochlear Implant Programme in South Africa in the Dept of Otorhinolaryngology at Tygerberg Hospital. This programme has gained international recognition. Its first multi-channel cochlear implant was done in 1986 and since then 264 adults and children have received a cochlear implant. Prof Wagenfeld continues to be involved in this Programme. Prof Wagenfeld was a charismatic and astute Head of department with a sharp intellect and skills in all three ENT disciplines, including Head and Neck.

Prof Johan (Zan) Reyneke, Head of the ENT division from 1988 to 1994, continued the interest in Otolaryngology, and he focused particularly on the teaching of both undergraduate and postgraduate students. He proved to be a fine educator and led many a young colleague to discover his/her full potential. His efforts ensured that the teaching of undergraduate ENT in the final clinical year, came to full fruition. Prof Reyneke was beloved by all his students and by his registrars. His dedication to education is appropriately symbolized in the special seminar room he established for academic meetings in the Department. He successfully negotiated for the establishment of a single G5 ward in place of the separate West (“White”) and East (“Non-White”) wards in 1990.

Prof R T (Theo) Gregor, the fourth Head, was appointed in 1995 and retired in 2000. He had a special interest special in Head and Neck Surgery. With his excellent surgical skills and insight into cancer of the head and neck, as well as an outgoing personality and international connections, Prof Gregor significantly advanced the reputation of the Division. Under his leadership, the scientific publications of the Division flourished.

Prof James Looock, the current Head, was appointed in 2001. He first joined the Division under Professor Reyneke and has interests in Otolaryngology, hearing and paediatric airway surgery He runs an annual Cape Temporal Bone Course in association with Professor George Browning of Scotland, who has become a good friend to the Department.

The Division has, over its 32 year history, trained 33 ENT surgeons and has contributed significantly to ENT teaching in the MBChB (undergraduate) programme, thereby ensuring that young doctors develop the necessary skills in this important clinical discipline. The Department sees an average of 9191 outpatients per year, and performs an estimated 1212 surgical procedures at Tygerberg Hospital. In addition, its outreach activities benefit the patients at a number of outlying hospitals, inter alia the Eben Dönges in Worcester, Stellenbosch Provincial, Eerste River and Karl Bremer Hospitals where outpatient services as well as ENT surgery are undertaken.

The current staffing of the Division consists of the Head, two full-time Consultants, 6 Registrars and a number part-time Consultants. The Department is also privileged to have had the longtime service and dedication of several very special people, inter alia Mrs Lida Müller (30 years’ service), Mrs Amanda Hugo (23 years) who has been secretary to five Heads of Department, and Mrs C P Barends (17 years).

The division maintains special co-operative relationships with a number of other groups, amongst others the Department of Speech-Language and Hearing Therapy, the Cochlear Implant Team, the Paedo-Audiology Unit, the Carel du Toit School, and the ENT Department of UCT/Groote Schuur with whom regular academic meetings are held.