

HONORARY GRADUATE

John Derek Lindsell Hansen

John Hansen was born in Kimberley in 1920. He graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery from the University of Cape Town in 1943 and served with the rank of Captain in the South African Air Force during the final eighteen months of the Second World War. Thereafter he pursued his chosen path leading to an academic career in Paediatrics; this at a time when the discipline was scarcely recognised in South Africa. In 1943, the year Hansen qualified, our University Department of Medicine allocated sixty hours in the undergraduate curriculum to teaching 'medical diseases peculiar to children'. Particular emphasis was placed on 'therapeutic foods', with various manipulations of milk to deal with frequently encountered gastro-intestinal dysfunction in infants and children.

The young Doctor Hansen gained his initial paediatric experience in Britain and the United States. There he was exposed to doyens of the time such as the neonatologist Clement Smith, who had developed new research techniques using flame photometry. Such influences fired John Hansen's enthusiasm and gave scope for his undoubted potential to become a paediatric and nutrition researcher of international repute. He was appointed as a Research Fellow at Harvard University from 1951 to 1952, and thereafter returned to serve his Alma Mater from 1953 to 1955 as Research Bursar CSIR Clinical Nutrition Unit under the guidance of the late Professor J F Brock. John Hansen spent fifteen years in the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of Cape Town as lecturer and later Associate Professor, during which time he led a world-recognised research team investigating all aspects of undernutrition in children.

Hansen's seminal contributions to nutritional research centred on the disordered metabolism of infants and children with severe protein energy malnutrition. His doctoral thesis is entitled 'Nitrogen metabolism in Kwashiorkor'. His achievements in research have resulted in more than 270 publications and chapters in books. He served on the World Health Organisation/Food and Agriculture Organisation Expert Committee on Protein Requirements, and received research grants from the National Institute of Health in the United States, and from WHO.

Although funded to pursue his interests, John Hansen was no ivory-tower researcher. He chose to work in areas of immediate import and relevance, and carried his studies and interventions out of the wards and laboratory settings to suffering children and disadvantaged communities. He served on various private and government committees addressing the nutritional needs of children, and willingly shared his knowledge and expertise with any who sought or needed it.

John Hansen has enabled many younger scientists to achieve postgraduate degrees and pursue research. Having developed facilities in Cape Town, he emulated them at Wits when, in 1971, he took over the academic leadership of the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health. Thus was developed the Metabolic and Nutrition Unit based at Baragwanath Hospital, funded jointly by the Medical Research Council, the University and Provincial Hospital Services. After Hansen's retirement, research in this unit continued in the Mineral Metabolism Research Unit headed by a Hansen successor, Professor John Pettifor. This on-going legacy of excellence in research has been widely acclaimed.

Besides his achievements in research and associated activities, Professor Hansen has other fine attributes. He is an excellent teacher, giving unstintingly of his time, and has been revered by doctors, students, nurses and lay people.

Noteworthy, but perhaps not sufficiently noticed, were the measures he took to mitigate the consequences of previously segregated hospital teaching. As head of department he undertook teaching rounds at all

three major teaching hospitals in the complex, thus ensuring clinical exposure - not simply during examinations - for all students to their academic head of department. He played a major role in unifying the component parts of the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health and his successors have built admirably on his work in that regard.

John Hansen has rare foresight in developing community-based and-orientated paediatrics. The establishment of Loewenstein Chairs first at the University of the Witwatersrand and subsequently at other universities, promoted such activities and were enhanced by his efforts. He was instrumental in securing the initial private funding for the Division of Community Paediatrics which from 1976 focused specifically on Primary Health Care Nurse Training in Soweto. Such endeavours pre-empted current health policy by nearly two decades.

Professor Hansen retired from his Wits University chair in 1985, retaining Emeritus status. He has been a recipient of numerous awards, including an honorary Doctor of Science degree from the University of Cape Town. Since his retirement John Hansen has continued to share his expertise through part-time consultancies at various organisations.

The profession, our universities and our country have much to be proud of and grateful for when we honour Professor John Hansen as a world-renowned nutrition scientist, as a teacher, as a paediatrician, and as a South African. It is an honour to present John Hansen for the degree of Doctor of Science in Medicine *honoris causa*.