

SELMA BROWDE

Passion and compassion are attributes that would immediately identify Selma Browde to her friends, patients and colleagues at Wits. She has devoted her life to caring for and improving the lives of others – as a doctor, a politician, a health activist, and an academic.

Selma Browde launched her career with a first class matric in 1943 from Rustenburg High School, Cape Town. She interrupted her medical studies to marry and have three children, graduating MBBCH from Wits in 1959, and obtaining her specialist MMed. qualification in Radiation Therapy in 1967. She was a consultant in the Department of Radiotherapy at the Johannesburg and Hillbrow hospitals for 19 years, with a short break when, as a provincial councillor, she was statutorily barred from being a provincial employee.

Dr Browde was Professor and Head of the Department of Radiation Therapy and Oncology from 1983 until she took early retirement for health reasons in 1986. In addition to her administrative and teaching duties, she maintained a research programme and also became deeply involved in organisations that would influence the profession or would assist patients.

She was a committee member of the National Cancer Association, Southern Transvaal, a member of the Advisory Board of the Family Life and Marriage Society of SA, chair of the executive committee of Hospice Witwatersrand, and a member of the Hospice board. She was a committee member of the Faculty of Radiology of the College of Medicine of South Africa; was elected to the Committee of the Southern Transvaal Branch of the Medical Association of SA (MASA); was involved in the alternative, anti-apartheid, National Medical and Dental Association (Namda); and, last year, was elected President of the Gauteng Branch of the MASA in recognition of her lifelong contribution to the profession.

In 1972 Dr Browde embarked on a political career when she was elected to the Johannesburg City Council, which she served until 1979. Her focus was on attempting to improve conditions for those who were politically disenfranchised. Projects she was involved in included the provision of high mast lighting in Soweto, access for Indian soccer teams to municipal fields, and the removal of the quota system for access to Soweto high schools. From 1974 to 1977 Dr Browde was a member of the Transvaal Provincial Council and an active leader of the Progressive Party.

Her commitment to disadvantaged communities is reflected in the many organisations on whose boards she sat, offering guidance, raising funds, giving enormous amounts of her personal time, and providing them with an outspoken and charismatic voice in public fora. Among these organisations were the Mobile Recreation Scheme for Soweto, the South African Association of Youth Clubs, the Action Committee of the Senior Citizens Foundation and the South African Institute of Race Relations, Southern Transvaal Region. She co-founded the Soweto Basketball Association, established the first

basketball court in Orlando East, and was treasurer of the association for eight years. She was a trustee and finance committee member of the Federated Union of Black Artists, a member of the council and a trustee of the Johannesburg Art Foundation, and a committee member of the National Education Union of SA.

In 1976 Dr Browde co-founded Actstop (Actions to Stop Removals) to fight Group Areas Act removals. In 1979, together with Dr Nthatho Motlana, she founded the 'Hunger Concern Programme', which evolved into Operation Hunger.

Years after she had left the provincial and city councils her concern for the city's residents continued to draw her in to their affairs. In 1988, Dr Browde founded and became director of the Soweto Electricity Advice Centre, which exposed faults and corruption in the billing system and achieved a change in tariffs to a flat rate, plus the writing off of arrears for all Soweto residents. Her sympathies with the difficulties experienced by students fighting against apartheid in the late 1980s led her to become chair of Friends of Nusas.

After her formal retirement from Wits and from party politics, her career took a new direction when she became involved in pain relief, pain management and palliative medicine. The interventions she champions in pursuit of her vision of 'patients without pain or suffering' are not reserved for the terminally ill, she believes they should form part of the practice of every speciality, and in every patient-doctor encounter.

Her initiatives in this regard have resulted in the inclusion of palliative medicine in the health policy of the ANC and of the Gauteng Health Department. In 1992, together with Professor T Shipton, she established the first pain clinic at Hillbrow Hospital. In 1997 she established the first pain clinic in a private hospital, becoming its first medical director. She persuaded the heads of medicine at the Chris Hani Baragwanath and Johannesburg hospitals to establish palliative care teams, and personally trained numerous nurses to staff and support these teams. In 1998 she founded the Palliative Medicine Institute, and has raised funds to grow it to its current complement of 11 staff members.

In recent years her work has become increasingly AIDS related, with education activities focused not only on doctors and nurses, but also on health facility managers, communities and patients. Her advocacy has also influenced policy. She contributed to the Draft Bill on Euthanasia and End of Life Decisions published by the Law Commission, and has presented these issues to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Health. She has been a committee member of numerous AIDS-related organisations. On discovering that her son was living with HIV, she founded the organisation Parents for AIDS Action.

Dr Browde has dedicated her life to the promotion of health. She has done this as a cancer therapist and researcher, striving to improve the cures, care and palliation available to patients. She has done it as a politician, working to improve the living conditions that determine the health of the poor. She has done it as a caring human being, spreading the word that suffering can be alleviated, teaching health professionals and

supporting the families of those who face death. She has done it as an activist who has succeeded in changing policies and attitudes.

It is with great pride and pleasure that the University confers on Selma Browde the degree of Doctor of Medicine *honoris causa*.