

## HONORARY GRADUATE

### Harold Cecil Seftel

Harold Cecil Seftel was born in Johannesburg on 28 December 1928. In 1945 he matriculated from Jeppe High School with distinctions in Latin and Greek. In the following year he began his association with this university, which has continued unbroken to this day. He registered in the Faculty of Medicine, obtaining the degree of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery in 1952.

Harry Seftel became an intern at Baragwanath Hospital in 1953. Thereafter he was appointed successively as Registrar, Medical Officer and, after being awarded the specialist qualification of Diploma in Medicine by this university, Physician. In 1964 he was appointed as Physician-in-charge of the Department of Medicine at what was at the time called the Johannesburg Non-European Hospital, was elevated to a chair as *Ad hominem* Professor of African Diseases in 1971, and finally, in 1982, was appointed as Professor of Medicine and Chief Physician at the Hillbrow Hospital.

Harry Seftel is an outstanding clinician who has made major contributions to the categorization of infective and non-infective diseases of black South Africans. He is one of the best undergraduate teachers in the Faculty, and was awarded the prestigious Tobias and Convocation Medal for undergraduate teaching in 1991. He is also a distinguished research worker. Since 1971 he has been the Director of the Medical Research Council Carbohydrate and Lipid Metabolism Research Group. He has encouraged research at many levels and is the author and co-author of more than two hundred publications in the fields of endocrinology, metabolism, diabetes, cardiology, haematology, nephrology, nutrition, pharmacology, community medicine and infective diseases.

Harry Seftel's research interests have been concerned with the epidemiology of many of the diseases that occur commonly in black South Africans (particularly oral iron overload, cryptogenic cardiomyopathy and arterial hypertension), in the Asian population (coronary artery disease, diabetes mellitus), and in the Afrikaner community (familial hypercholesterolaemia), and with the characterization of the risk factors that underlie these common disease processes. The extraordinary breadth of his research interests and activities and his enthusiasm in pursuing them explains why he has been able to contribute to knowledge in so many fields. His co-workers in these research endeavours have included a galaxy of local and international academics. This work, as in all his research endeavours, ranges from an epidemiological approach to basic laboratory experimentation. He has not been content simply to have his research published in leading scientific journals, but has taken its implications to the general public through striking presentations in the media.

Although risk factors have been the dominant theme of Harry Seftel's research, his enormous intellectual curiosity has led him into other areas, such as iron metabolism and haematology, pure endocrinology, pharmacology and therapeutics, and renal disease. In addition to his mainstream interests, he established the Renal Unit at Baragwanath Hospital in 1960, was co-founder of the Liver Unit at the Johannesburg Hospital, and founder and President of the Infectious Diseases Society of South Africa, Founder President of the Aspirin Foundation of Southern Africa and Chairman of the Clinical Committee of the South African Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence. He is also past Chairman or President of the Society for Endocrinology, Metabolism and Diabetes of South Africa, the Lipid and Atherosclerosis Society of Southern Africa, the Southern African Hypertension Society and the Southern African Council Against Smoking.

Harry Seftel is probably best known for his talks on radio and television, which span the whole range of general medicine. His attempts to educate the public combine unique teaching skills, his vast general knowledge and a critical and enquiring mind that has been moulded by his deep immersion in research. Many aphorisms are attributed to him, one of the most revealing his saying, 'trust no one, least of all

yourself'. Thus he has tried to discover the truth, but as importantly has tried to convey the truth in simple language to the public at large. In this he has succeeded superbly.

Harry Seftel has brought unique qualities of personality and intellect to bear on medicine in this country. His contribution has been extraordinary and his influence felt by every student who has heard him lecture or worked in his wards. Although he officially retired from his chair at the end of 1993, his energy continues unabated. He remains in the Department of Medicine as an Emeritus Professor and an Honorary Professorial Research Fellow with a part-time appointment at Hillbrow Hospital. He is still teaching, continuing with his research, seeing patients and educating the general public.

The University is proud to be able to express its appreciation of the distinguished contribution of Harry Cecil Seftel, man of quality, to his Alma Mater and to the community at large by conferring on him the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.