

CITATION: KUBEDI PATRICK MOKHOB

Professor Kubedi Patrick Mokhobo is a pioneering cardiologist, academic and public servant whose life's work has transformed medicine and healthcare across southern Africa.

Born on 5 July 1932 in Potchefstroom, Professor Mokhobo espoused great academic aptitude from an early age, and driven by his determination to succeed, he supported himself through working as a farm labourer and caddying, whilst excelling academically at both the primary and secondary school level. This laid a solid foundation for his remarkable career in medicine.

In 1952 he was admitted to the University of Fort Hare to get the required credits to gain him admission into the second year of medical studies at Wits. He enrolled at Wits University a year later and was awarded a scholarship loan by Wits, and subsequently a full scholarship by the African Medical Students Trust Fund.

He qualified as a medical doctor in 1957 and graduated from Wits, where he was awarded the William Craib prize for being the best African medical student of his year. He started his internship at Baragwanath Hospital and five years later, became the first Black registrar, specialising in paediatrics and internal medicine.

During this period, he set up his solo practice in Daveyton, Benoni, and became a founding member of the Pan Africanist Congress.

In 1966, he became the first Black doctor to pass the prestigious Medical Fellowship examinations, again breaking racial barriers. Two years later, he wrote and passed the British Specialist Examination in the United Kingdom. His pioneering work culminated in his recognition as the first Black cardiologist in southern Africa in 1973.

Professor Mokhobo's influence extended beyond South Africa. As the first medical specialist in Swaziland and a founding figure of Lesotho's medical institutions, he played a significant role in establishing professional bodies, medical journals (including the *Lesotho Medical Journal*) and congresses that strengthened regional healthcare systems. He established the Lesotho Medical Association and Medical Congress in 1972 and was instrumental in founding the first Lesotho Medical Association and organising the first ever Lesotho Medical Congress, which brought together medical professionals from across the region.

He went on to serve as the Minister of Health in Bophuthatswana, where he championed primary healthcare reform from 1979 – 1981. He introduced communitybased healthcare systems, advanced the training of nurses as clinicians and helped to decentralise services so that they could reach underserved communities, thereby trying to entrench equitable healthcare delivery for all. He was instrumental in the reorganisation of mission hospitals into state-owned facilities, including the transformation of Bophelong Psychiatric Hospital into what became the Mahikeng Provincial Hospital.

As an academic and institutional leader, Professor Mokhobo joined Medunsa in 1990 and worked his way up to serving as Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, where he influenced generations of medical professionals. He lectured in cardiology and family medicine, trained healthcare professionals across multiple countries and contributed to the development of curricula and training programmes. His work in nursing education, particularly in advancing the role of nurses as clinicians, left a lasting imprint on healthcare practice and professional training in South Africa.

He returned to clinical medicine practice in 2000 as a senior specialist in internal medicine at Natalspruit hospital and then Tembisa hospital, whilst still lecturing at Medunsa. In 2007, he accepted a post as a provincial specialist cardiologist at the Potchefstroom Provincial Hospital.

Professor Mokhobo played a key role in developing national health policy, including drafting the first essential drug list for South Africa and contributing to the introduction of compulsory community service for doctors. His contributions extended to advisory roles, national commissions and professional bodies that shaped post-apartheid healthcare policy.

A prolific author, his scholarship is reflected in his numerous publications in local and international medical journals, and his leadership of professional organisations and committees. He is also the recipient of several awards and an honorary doctorate from North-West University.

Following his formal retirement at the age of 86 in 2018, Professor Mokhobo continued to serve as a clinician, educator and mentor, embodying his lifelong commitment to medicine and humanity.

His legacy is further reflected in his philanthropic work. He was the co-founder of the South African Medical Discussion Group, which became an organ for fundraising and awarding interest free scholarships to students at Natal Medical School. In 2021, the Professor KP Mokhobo Foundation was launched with the aim of providing financial support to young students who wish to pursue careers in medicine. Through this initiative, Professor Mokhobo extended his lifelong commitment to service by helping to create opportunities for future generations of healthcare professionals.

In recognition of his lifelong achievements, his dedication to medicine and healthcare, his contribution to education and training, and his commitment to serving the people of southern Africa, it is befitting that the University of the Witwatersrand confers an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Medicine, Honoris Causa on Professor Kubedi Patrick Mokhobo.