UNIVERSITY GOLD MEDAL AWARD - Professor David Blumsohn

Professor David Blumsohn has devoted more than 50 years of his life to the practice of medicine in South Africa, almost exclusively in the public sector serving the desperately poor and sick patients from Soweto who pour through the doors of Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital. He has given unswerving and loyal service to the Department of Medicine at this hospital for more than 4 decades: initially as Registrar, then as Physician, Senior Physician, Principal Physician and Head of one of the large medical units. After his retirement in 1997, he has continued to work in the department as Honorary Professor, sharing his extensive knowledge, experience and wisdom with students, doctors and patients.

David Blumsohn possesses all the qualities of a great physician. He has an outstanding intellect, an encyclopedic knowledge of .medicine, and an ability to inspire students. But above all, he is an

humanitarian, ever-sensitive to the predicament of the downtrodden. He practices what he preaches: he treats all his patients with dignity and respect and is always available to them. Often times there is a queue of outpatients at his office door in search of solace or taxi fare. He wrote a moving article for the medical students' journal, The Leech, entitled "The Pathology of Poverty" which has had a major influence on the thinking of our students. He was at the forefront of a campaign at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in 1987 in which doctors from the Department of Medicine protested at the deplorable conditions our patients had to endure. This protest action embarrassed the apartheid government sufficiently to allow the private sector to intervene and build ward extensions to enable our patients to be appropriately accommodated.

David Blumsohn is a scholar of note. Not only has he published widely in the medical literature but he has also been invited to leading cardiological and other medical institutions in North and South America as visiting professor, researcher, or teacher. Our own students hold him in the highest regard as teacher and mentor. He regularly receives letters and gifts from the students expressing their gratitude for his teaching, philosophy, guidance and mentoring, and for showing them the importance of patient-centered medicine. He was the recipient of the PV Tobias and Convocation Award for distinguished teaching in 1996. He is definitely one of the students' heroes which is borne out by the fact that he has been the guest speaker at the final year medical students' ball for the past 5 years. Professor Blumsohn also has scholarly interests outside of medicine. He holds a doctorate in Semitic languages and is extremely widely read.

In recognition of the abovementioned extraordinary contributions to the Faculty of Health Sciences and its students, and to the community of Soweto, it is an honour to award the Gold Medal of the University of the Witwatersrand to Professor David Blumsohn.