



Prof Lungile Pepeta (16 July 1974 - 7 August 2020)

Professor Lungile Pepeta was born and bred in Ludeke, a village just outside Bizana, Eastern Cape, South Africa, where he grew up attending to cattle like all young men in the villages. He received his primary and secondary education in Bizana and matriculated from Bizana Village High School in 1991. Lungile was drawn into the field of Medicine immediately after matriculating. He joined the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Transkei (now Walter Sisulu University) in 1992 as a medical student, graduating at the top of his class with his MBChB degree in 1997.

After qualifying as a medical doctor, he went on to do his internship at the Mthatha General Hospital (now Nelson Mandela Academic Hospital) in 1998. The internship was followed by community service as a medical officer undertaken at the Frontier Hospital in Queenstown and Dordrecht Hospital in 1999. It was then that he developed a passion for paediatrics and went on to complete a Diploma in Child Health Examination with the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa in October 1999. After community service, Lungile took up a position as a Medical Officer in Paediatrics at King Edward VIII Hospital in January 2000.

In July 2000, he joined the Registrar Training Programme in Paediatrics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). He was admitted as a Fellow of Paediatricians by the College of Paediatrics, obtaining an FC Paed (SA) certificate after passing his exit written and oral examinations in 2003. After qualifying as a paediatrician, he moved back to the Eastern Cape to take the position as Head of Paediatrics Department at Frontier Hospital in July 2004.

In November 2005, he joined the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital as a consultant paediatrician. It was at this time he started training as a Paediatric Cardiologist with the Division of Paediatric Cardiology at the University of the Witwatersrand. He obtained his Certificate in Paediatric Cardiology (SA) through the College of Paediatricians of South Africa in 2008. Due to his love for his birth Province, he moved back to the Eastern Cape (Gqeberha) 2009. He was appointed at Dora Nginza Hospital as a Paediatric Cardiologist and as Head of Department of Paediatrics in March 2009.

Through his training and qualification periods, he impressed his teachers with his sharp intellect, passion for knowledge and a genuine interest in his patients. His colleagues talk of a wonderful sense of humour and a warm, caring and compassionate nature. He was always ready for a smile and conversation and was known for his open hospitality and love for shared stories over a meal.

It was at Dora Nginza that Lungile started perfecting his craft in the catheterisation laboratory. He pioneered plenty of novel interventional procedures and was instrumental in attracting many subspecialists in joining him to build a formidable Paediatrics Department. Lungile started publishing scientific manuscripts and was a sought-after guest speaker, faculty member and organiser at both local and international conferences. In December 2014, he was admitted as a Fellow of the Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions, USA (FSCAI). He was the first to establish a much-needed Paediatric Cardiology unit in the Eastern Cape. During the time of his death, Lungile had trained 3 Paediatric Cardiologists, one of which has gone on to open a second Paediatric Cardiology unit in Mthatha.

In January 2016, he was appointed as Associate Professor of Paediatrics, WSU, Gqeberha Teaching Satellite. This was a befitting title for a man extremely passionate about teaching. It was at this time that he started talking about the idea of being part of the establishment of a Medical School in at Nelson Mandela University (NMU). This became his passion and he talked, walked, slept and dreamed of a Medical School at NMU. His appointment as Executive Dean on 1 January 2017, Faculty of Health Sciences, Nelson Mandela University did not come as a surprise to many.

Despite his busy schedule with the ground work of establishing a Medical School, he served as the President of the Paediatric Cardiac Society of South Africa (PCSSA); Vice President of the South African Heart Association and Executive Member of the South African Paediatric Association. Just before he died Prof Pepeta had been appointed as Chairperson of the Council for Medical Schemes in June 2020. All these positions were infused with his particular style; he would be fully involved in all activities, consider the bigger picture in terms of impact on the profession and associations and promote new ideas and innovations. The tragic loss of a young paediatric cardiologist friend and colleague, Gcina Dumani affected him greatly, and he was active in ensuring that his memory would continue within the small paediatric cardiology community of South Africa.

He was a committed researcher, involved in several studies spanning Rheumatic Heart Disease (The INVICTUS study) and Adult Congenital Heart Disease (Adole 7-C) and supervising several MMed students during his tenure. At the time of his death Prof Pepeta was completing his PhD with the University of Stellenbosch, focusing on novel implementation of interventional procedures. To most of us Lungile was a caring friend and colleague, whose infectious smile impacted all those who crossed his path. He hated injustice, and was a stringent advocate for equality, often providing for all the voiceless children with heart disease. His passion for health in the Eastern Cape, manifest by his desire for a medical school in the

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region and a flourishing hospital within the township area serving the community who need it most, was unprecedented and deeply appreciated by his community. His patients and their families speak fondly and with deep grief of his care and concern and his courageous lobbying for their needs, as the region struggled with resources and poor health infrastructure. To the very end, he was optimistic and enthusiastic, working from his hospital bed and sending encouraging comments to his friends and family. A humble man from humble beginnings, dedicated to his profession, loyal to his friends, and loving to his family. May we ensure that his legacy lives on.

Lungile is survived by his wife Noluvuyo whom he loved and respected dearly and 2 children Kungawo and Lungaka whom he loved and cherished.

Professor Hopewell Ntsinjana

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