

Tribute to Professor Peter Adrian Leggat

1961–2023

Mary Ross and Albie de Frey

It was with profound shock and disbelief that we learned of the death of our colleague and friend, Peter Leggat, following a stroke and heart attack in Brisbane while travelling home from a Sydney conference in September. A mere two weeks previously, he had retired from James Cook University after 30 years of service, as Professor Emeritus and Director-Emeritus, World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Vector-borne and Neglected Tropical Diseases. The reality dawned during his online funeral at which his close colleagues described his tremendous contribution to medicine, nationally and globally.

We first met Peter in 1998, while he was conducting research in Mpumalanga and we were planning a travel medicine module for the MSc in Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). The course started in 2000 in collaboration with James Cook University in Townsville, Australia, and the South African Department of Health, which sought training to license providers of the yellow fever vaccine in South Africa. Peter came to South Africa regularly to present the lion's share of the course content based on the textbook that he wrote to train general practitioners in Australia and New Zealand. Subsequently, he served as the external examiner for the Wits postgraduate short course organised by the South African Society of Travel Medicine.

Over the last two decades, Peter was not only a generous source of wisdom, but was also an unassuming, convivial companion with whom we shared great fun in our many escapades related to our course and the many International Society of Travel Medicine (ISTM) conferences that we all attended. Outside of collaborating on presentations and workshops, our pleasurable adventures centred on food, sightseeing, and shopping on a shoestring around the globe in Geneva, Montreal, Shanghai, Lisbon, Edinburgh, New York, and Basel, plus Brisbane, Melbourne, Cape Town, and Gqeberha in our home countries.

One of the memorable course-related experiences entailed teaching in the Western Cape. Since the host organisation could not provide assistance for the course, Peter and our team had to use all our booked-in luggage allowance to transport 100 kg of paper notes, with only carry-on bags for our personal belongings. Finally in Stellenbosch, we spent a night sorting out the 120 files. The next day, Peter and Mary trudged in the searing heat to buy the last four flip-chart markers left in the city's stationery shops, and find the one-and-only photocopy outlet. Despite his jet lag, Peter endured these setbacks with his typical good humour.

Peter's CV demonstrates his academic and research accomplishments, and personal accolades, to which most of us can only aspire. At the age of 30, Peter became a Founding Fellow of the Australian College of Tropical Medicine, to which, as President, he honoured both of us with honorary fellowships soon after we established the Travel Medicine Course in South Africa. In addition, he established and became Deputy Editor-in-Chief for the Australian College of Tropical Medicine journal, *Tropical Medicine and Infectious Disease*,



Prof. Peter Adrian Leggat

Photograph: courtesy of Prof. Mary Ross

"Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory."

-Dr Seuss

for which we are both members of the editorial board. In recognition for his exceptional assistance in establishing travel medicine in South Africa, we contributed to his being acknowledged through a Fellowship of the College of Public Health Medicine (SA), a Fellowship of the Faculty of Public Health (UK), and as Visiting Professor to the University of the Witwatersrand.

As an academic researcher, Peter published more than 500 journal papers (with more than 9 000 citations), including several in *Occupational*

Health Southern Africa. He also wrote more than 100 book chapters and 30 books, and presented in excess of 400 papers at national and international conferences. He was Immediate Past President of the ISTM, a member of the Australasian Public Health Medicine Council, and a member of the Expanded Board of the International Federation for Tropical Medicine. Peter was also a medical officer in the Australian Army, a colonel in the Australian Defence Force, and an honorary aide-de-camp to the Governor-General of Australia. His exceptional service to the community was recognised by many prestigious awards such as recognition as a Member of the General Division of the Order of Australia, and as a Knight of Grace of the Order of St John. In spite of his many academic achievements and awards in various fields of medicine, Peter was self-effacing and very generous in sharing his knowledge and supporting colleagues in their endeavours.

Our last personal contact with Peter was in May 2023 at the ISTM conference in Basel, where he completed his presidential term. Subsequently, we received his annual 'Christmas in July' letter that described the excitement of completing and furnishing his retirement home in Thailand to which he was looking forward to moving with Urepon, and his trip of a lifetime to Quito and Galapagos, Ecuador, for a Scientific Programme Committee. In addition, we were negotiating with Peter to write a guidance note on occupational dengue for *Occupational Health Southern Africa* as an expert in the field and an active member of the Scientific Committee: Biohazards and Occupational Health for the International Commission on Occupational Health.

Following his retirement, Peter was apparently intending to research into why people died while travelling: as a colleague of his said, *"an irony as he became the first statistic"*.

Our sincere condolences go to his wife, Urepon (Pan), and father, Bruce, as well as global friends and colleagues in travel medicine, tropical medicine, public health, and occupational medicine. Thank you for the opportunity to attend the very moving funeral service from afar, online. We shall remember Peter for his unwavering encouragement, guidance and friendship over the last 25 years, and cherish the many wonderful memories. 📍