

In memoriam: Dr Ferdie Smith 1938–2024

(BSc, MBChB, DPH, DOH, MMED (Prev Med), MCPHM (SA) (OccMed))

Claudia Frost: Coordinator, SASOM National Office

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Claudina Nogueira: SASOM ExCo member (co-opted)

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Dr Ferdie Smith, a pioneering figure in the fields of occupational health and community medicine in South Africa, passed away on 1 September 2024 in Pretoria, at the age of 86. Born on 3 April 1938 in Bethal, in the then Transvaal, he was the eldest of five children. His deep passion for nature, bonsai art, classical music, and opera enriched his life, and these interests were shared and enjoyed with his family.

Dr Smith's academic journey began at the University of South Africa (UNISA) where he completed his Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree. He later pursued his medical degree (MBChB) and advanced qualifications at the University of Pretoria (UP), a path that would lead him to become a key advocate for the medical specialisation in community health, now known as public health medicine.

Dr Smith began his medical career as an intern at Boitumelo Hospital in Kroonstad in 1971, followed by his role as a general practitioner in Standerton in 1972. His commitment to community health was evident early in his career, as he served as a part-time medical officer at Standerton Hospital and the South African National Tuberculosis Association (SANTA) Centre, and was also the medical officer of health for the Standerton Town Council during the 1970s.

In 1979, Dr Smith took on the role of Chief Medical Officer at the Pretoria City Council, marking the beginning of a distinguished career in public service. From 1984 until his retirement, he served as a senior lecturer in occupational health in the Department of Community Health, at UP. His academic contributions were extensive, including a six-month tenure as a visiting lecturer at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. He was also an external examiner for several South African universities.



Dr Ferdie Smith

Photograph: courtesy of SASOM

Dr Smith's influence extended beyond the classroom. He was actively involved in various professional bodies, holding key positions such as National Chair of the South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM) from 1993 to 1997, and later becoming an honorary member of the Society in 1998. His commitment to occupational health was further demonstrated through his service as an occupational health consultant to numerous industries and institutions, his role as a medical practitioner for the Statutory Examination of Radiation Workers, and as a medical assessor for the Compensation Board – a position appointed by the Minister of Labour under the Compensation for Occupational Injuries

and Diseases Act (COIDA).

After retiring from UP, Dr Smith continued with his steadfast contributions to occupational health and medicine as the industrial specialist at Tshwane Academic Hospital until 2016. He also served as a specialist witness for the Compensation Commissioner. His selfless dedication to the medical profession and his unwavering commitment to advancing occupational health in South Africa have left an indelible mark on the discipline.

Dr Smith will be remembered not only for his professional achievements but also for his warmth, his love for his family, and his lifelong pursuit of knowledge and cultural enrichment.

His legacy will continue to inspire future generations in the field of occupational health, and beyond.

The SASOM ExCo and members extend their deepest condolences to Ferdie's family, friends, and colleagues, on the loss of such a valuable member of the occupational health and medicine fraternity. He will be sorely missed by many who knew him, and his lifelong commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of workers and communities alike will be remembered. May his soul rest in eternal peace. 🙏