Professor Gill Nelson

Mary Ross: OHSA Board Member; SASOM Executive Member; Honorary Professor, University of the Witwatersrand

The promotion of the Editor-in-Chief of *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, Professor Gill Nelson, provides the overdue opportunity for recognition of her achievements, both academically and for the journal. In April 2025, Gill was appointed as Assistant Dean of Postgraduate Affairs in the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). She continues to head the Occupational Health Division in the School of Public Health, a position she has held since 2013, and is concurrently an Adjunct Professor at the Barrow Neurological Institute (USA).

After gaining a BSc Hons degree in Human Genetics at Wits, she completed a Master's degree in Genetics while working in the Epidemiology section at the National Centre (now Institute) for Occupational Health. Gill then undertook postgraduate training at McGill University in Canada and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and subsequently obtained her PhD in Occupational Health. Although she has spent most of her career in the field of occupational epidemiology, she has also had other exciting forays into the pharmaceutical industry and the Perinatal HIV Research Unit at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital. This extensive and varied career course has contributed to her impressive reputation for teaching and research, as well as in the role of Editor-in-Chief of *Occupational Health Southern Africa*.

I have had the privilege of observing Gill's academic and career progression over the last 35 years, since I was a registrar in Public Health Medicine and she was an epidemiology researcher and excellent biostatistics lecturer on the Diploma in Occupational Health. My initial experience of being taught occupational epidemiology and biostatistics by Gill was echoed by all the Diploma students – a challenging topic made clear and comprehensible.

Gill has established enduring international alliances with researchers in other countries such as the UK, the USA, and Sweden. The international research collaborations, publications, and presentations speak for the local and international recognition of Gill's research expertise, focused on occupational and environmental exposures and respiratory diseases. Much of her work has involved the mining sector, including her PhD on silica exposure and her current work on manganese exposure. In recognition for her ongoing contribution in research and mentoring postgraduates, Gill was awarded prestigious Oppenheimer Memorial Trust funding to support a sabbatical to conduct projects with international collaborators.

Throughout her career, Gill has been an effective communicator and, in recent years, has concentrated on developing postgraduate researchers. As a National Research Foundation (NRF) rated scientist she has been, and continues to be, an excellent, much-admired lecturer in epidemiology and much sought-after research mentor and advisor to students and other researchers. Her teaching philosophy is to assist postgraduate students to write well, since communication skills are vital for effective dissemination of their research findings. Through her university role and *Occupational Health Southern Africa* editorship, Gill recognised the dire need for research writing tuition:

Professor Gill Nelson *Photograph: courtesy of Gill Nelson*

she initiated various workshops for scientific writing, research report writing, and development of peer-reviewed manuscripts. In addition, she initiated coaching in research ethics for which I provided input for the first MPH students in occupational hygiene.

As Editor of *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, Gill has applied her own considerable abilities in scientific writing to mentoring this skill that is lacking in South Africa. Her teaching role as Editor of the journal is invaluable to all authors submitting papers, with her meticulous editing and encouragement to improve both the research reporting and the quality of the journal. To this end, her own expertise and her extensive global expert contacts that provide a panel of reviewers are invaluable. Gill is responsible for the overall content of *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, including initial and final assessment of the manuscripts submitted, identifying reviewers, communicating with authors, mentoring inexperienced authors, editing papers, plus working with the publication team and chairing the Editorial Board meetings. With her own publication experience of more than 80 papers and several book chapters, Gill's mentorship is invaluable to all authors submitting papers.

Apart from her academic prowess and success, Gill is also a superb negotiator, event organiser, and companion for both work and leisure pursuits. I have benefitted from these talents on many occasions, from her arranging biomarker workshops in idyllic settings, conference accommodation at exotic destinations, visiting a camel market in Egypt, to shopping in the *souks* of Marrakech. Although, unlike her two academic mentors, Professors Margot Becklake and Jill Murray, I cannot bask in the vicarious success of Gill's academic achievements and successful career, I cherish having been able to support her over the years in facilitating obtaining of sponsorship for her research, as well as in her editorial role at *Occupational Health Southern Africa*.