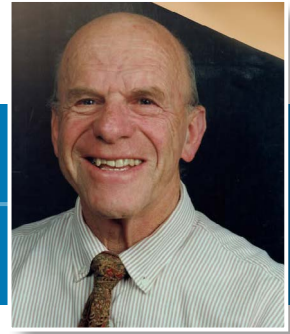


# OBITUARY

## Prof Isidor (Issy) Segal

May 1933–April 2024



The SAGES community mourns the sad loss of another stalwart and pioneer in South African gastroenterology. Issy Segal dedicated his working life to gastroenterology and was the founding member of the African Institute of Digestive Diseases based at Baragwanath Hospital and the erstwhile Johannesburg General Hospital. This institute offered training and research in gastroenterology to countless local and foreign (mostly from Africa) graduates. Issy was bestowed with an honorary life president award from SAGES in 1991 emphasising the great work he did for gastroenterology in South Africa and for SAGES as a whole. His enthusiasm and energetic nature is sorely missed along with his willingness to always assist. Rest in peace.

### *A tribute from the Segal Family:*

Professor Isidor Segal, a pioneering gastroenterologist and a compassionate advocate for underserved communities, passed away on April 18th, 2024 at the age of 90. His career was studded with many accomplishments but to me, he was, and always will be, simply Dad. I can still feel his big stubby fingers holding my hand in a gentle display of love, I can still see his kind smile and I can still hear his somewhat mischievous laughter after sharing one of his many humorous stories (usually a self-effacing anecdote).

Born in Johannesburg, he devoted his life to advancing medicine in Africa and beyond.

He began his career as a general practitioner in Soweto, something that was almost unheard of at the time. He didn't care about what others thought of him, about making big money or about status. He cared about those in pain. It was a decision which changed the direction of his life and his work, the lives of many black South Africans and ultimately, a particular discipline of medicine in Africa.

While treating his patients, he noticed trends related to their digestive systems. This was both in terms of disorders they had and those they didn't. He decided to pursue this further by specialising in gastroenterology and eventually establishing Africa's first Gastroenterology Unit at Baragwanath Hospital in 1975. Over nearly three decades, his groundbreaking research, including studies on oesophageal cancer and dietary influences, reshaped the understanding of gastrointestinal diseases in Africa.

In 1992, Prof. Segal founded the African Institute of Digestive Diseases with training centres at two of Wits' teaching hospitals, Baragwanath and the then Johannesburg General. Its aim was to promote gastroenterological education, training and research in south, central and northern Africa.

The African Institute of Digestive Diseases, champions education, research, and healthcare improvements across the continent. His vision transcended medicine, breaking cultural barriers and inspiring collaboration to address Africa's health challenges.

He served on the World Gastroenterology Organisation's Education and Training Committee for Africa and the Middle East. He was also on the Scientific Advisory Committee for the World Congress of Gastroenterology in 1998. His peers recognised his contribution and he was made president of the South African Gastroenterology Society, SAGES, from 1987 to 1988 and Honorary Life-President in 2001. The Faculty of Health Sciences presented him with an exceptional service medal in 1998. In 2009 he was named a Master of the World Gastroenterology Organisation. The highest honour the organisation can bestow on a member, granted for outstanding dedication to the mission of the organisation and to those who have achieved distinction in areas such as scholarly research, teaching, and service to the community at large.

He authored influential works, such as *Digestive Diseases in Sub-Saharan Africa* which he published at the age of 86, demonstrating his unstoppable tenacity and his desire to spread the wisdom he had gained to enable others to heal and be healed.

He was also a deeply sensitive person, feeling the adversity of those around him. This is so evident in a collection of poems that he published *Diary of a Slumboboy*, reflecting his intense empathy for Soweto's residents and showcasing the profound sadness that was so much a part of his daily life.

But I would like to go back to the man I knew, Dad. He was warm, curious and kind. He was the glue in a social setting, having those around him repeatedly in hysterics - and he was brilliant. But you would never know it. He had an incredible humility that fostered a feeling of openness and warmth with whoever he interacted with.

Ma was always at his side, supporting, listening and encouraging. Their incredible marriage, which lasted over 60 years, was one of the major ingredients in his success.

He was "Doctor" or "Prof" to his patients who loved him, Issy to his colleagues who respected him, Uncle Is to his entire extended family who he cared for with so much love, Dad to his children and "Zaida" to his 13 grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren. In truth though, he was much more than those names or titles. He was a great soul who came into this world and from a broken and dark childhood shone light on the world. Professor Segal, thank you, Dad we will never forget you.

Kindest regards  
The Segal family