



Obituary

Professor HH Vorster (1943–2020)

Professor HH (Esté) Vorster was a former Director of the Centre of Excellence for Nutrition in the Faculty of Health Sciences of the North-West University (NWU), Potchefstroom, South Africa. In 1989, she obtained a DSc in Physiology from NWU with a thesis on 'The effects of dietary fibre on lipid and haemostatic risk factors of non-communicable diseases'. Professor Vorster started Nutrition Research at the University in the 1980s. She conceptualised Nutrition as a multidisciplinary domain, from molecules to society, and pioneered research and infrastructure development to address malnutrition problems in Africa on basic (molecular and genetic), clinical and epidemiological levels. She was internationally recognised for her work on the role of dietary fibre in health, the relationship between diet and blood coagulation and later for her contribution to understanding the nutrition transition and its determinants and consequences in Africa. Professor Vorster was a dedicated capacity builder and initiator of research, who supervised thirty-three PhD and numerous MSc students and published more than 300 research papers in peer-reviewed scientific journals, books, chapters in books, editorials and research reports.

She received several awards to recognise her value-driven contribution as a thought leader and transdisciplinary thinker, including the Nevin Scrimshaw award for 'vision and leadership in nutrition training and service to international nutrition' from the African Nutrition Society, and was elected as an International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS) Fellow for rendering outstanding service to the cause of nutrition. Professor Vorster served on several councils, working groups and panels, as Secretary-General of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), the South Africa-Netherlands Programme for Alternatives in Development and the '5-a-day for Better Health Trust'. As IUNS Council member, she organised and chaired the International Nutrition Congress in Durban in 2005. She served as consultant and scientific

advisor for international agencies such as the WHO, FAO, CODEX and UNICEF. She made an important contribution as member of the WHO/FAO working group on carbohydrates and energy requirements. She initiated the Food Based Dietary Guideline process nationally and worked as an international consultant to the WHO to develop and implement the guidelines in several countries. She was on the editorial boards of a number of international journals of nutrition and health, including Public Health Nutrition.

Professor Vorster understood the basic sciences exceptionally well and was able to advise on programme implementation at a population level. Throughout her career, she has not only performed cutting-edge research but also applied research methodologies from a molecular to an epidemiological level to advance our understanding of nutrition and to influence local and global policy. She was a keen advocate for public health nutrition in Africa. Her pioneering work created many opportunities for numerous South African nutrition researchers, and she was an inspiration to all who had the privilege of working with and studying under her.

We remember her as a brave woman in these last years of fighting cancer, always joyful, energetic and kind. The love for her children, Jan and Hattie, and grandchildren was admirable. Her legacy lives on in the countless number of scientists and practitioners who have benefitted from her as a mentor over the span of her illustrious, visionary career.

Johann Jerling, Salome Kruger, Marius Smuts,
Christine Venter, Edelweiss Wentzel-Viljoen,
Marlien Pieters and Robin Dolman

Centre of Excellence for Nutrition North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa