The Most Influential Scientists in the Development of Medical Informatics (18): Isaacs Sedick

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ISAACK SEDICK (1940-2012)

Isaacs Sedick, PhD (1940-2012) was born and grew up in the Bo-Kaap, Cape Town, Western Cape. From an early age, Isaacs was fascinated with science and was engaged in performing science experiments at home. At the age of 13, he was involved in distributing political pamphlets and attending meetings of the Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA) and the Non European Unity Movement (NEUM). After completing his education, Isaacs worked as teacher at Trafalgar High School in Cape Town. It was while teaching at the school that he met Achmad Cassiem. Isaacs with his knowledge of explosives tried to train some of his friends in the use of this. This attracted the attention of the security police who monitored their activities. Consequently, Isaacs, his friends Achmad Cassiem, Marnie Abrahams were arrested in 1964 following the testing of explosives at Strandfontein Beach, Cape Town. They were taken to Caledon Police Station. However, the guards caught them and as punishment their

food privileges were stopped and their supply of toilet paper withdrawn. In the ensuing 'trial held on the Island, where he was officially 'charged' for writing unauthorised letters (related to the hunger strike), the prison authorities found Isaacs guilty and sentenced him to be flogged. Furthermore, his study privileges were also withdrawn. After his release from solitary confinement, Isaacs resumed his duties as chair of the Education Committee in prison and later the chair of the First Aid Unit. He taught mathematics and physical science to his fellow

inmates. Isaacs completed a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics while on the Island. When he attempted to enrol for postgraduate studies (a MSc degree), this was blocked. He was compelled to enrol for another undergraduate degree in Information Science, Mathematical Statistics and Computer Science. Upon his release, he became a Specialist Scientist in Medical Informatics and Statistics and then the Head of Department of Medical Informatics at Groote Schuur Hospital on Cape Town. Isaacs made five attempts to escape from the Island, albeit all unsuccessful. Upon his release, he was banned for seven years. He was even refused permission by the then Minister of Justice to attend the University of Cape Town (UCT) for postgraduate studies.

Nevertheless, he managed to register at the UCT and was forced to meet with his lecturers, clandestinely, in the Cape Town Botanical Gardens. Due to his banning orders, it was extremely difficult to obtain employment even when vacancies were open

to him. After his banning orders expired in 1986, Isaacs was elected as an Honorary Fellow of the IMIA for outstanding contribution to Medical and Health Informatics. He also obtained a visa to undertake a sabbatical in Ger-

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many in 1990 where he was able to complete his PhD. He was then elected Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society and a Chartered Member of the British Computer Society. In 2010, Isaacs was elected Honorary Fellow of the IMIA and in 2011, he was nominated as a Companion of Demontford University in the United Kingdom. Again, in 2010 Isaacs was nominated as a Sports Icon by the Department of Arts, Culture and Recreation for his contribution to Sport on Robben Island. He was a driving force behind the development of health informatics in South Africa, in Africa through HELINA, and internationally—in addition to the contributions and sacrifices he made for the freedom of his country, especially during the time he was imprisoned on Robben Island. Isaacs was 23

when he began a 13-year sentence for sabotage, sharing time with Nelson Mandela, after the apartheid police captured him in 1964.

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