

DIVISION OF RHEUMATOLOGY

Aiming for excellence in teaching, research
and service delivery



Professor
Asgar Ali Kalla
Head of Rheumatology

A culture of holistic care for patients with rheumatic disease is encouraged in the Division of Rheumatology, with an emphasis on early diagnosis, a curiosity for identifying unusual aspects of clinical presentation, the hunger to pursue questions to their conclusion and a desire to learn more about disease mechanisms being key.

“The Division of Rheumatology has always aimed at excellence in the provision of service, teaching and training as well as research,” says the head of department Professor Asgar Ali Kalla. “Over the past five years or so, we have successfully managed to reduce the referral time for outpatients to our clinics so that new patients with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) and rheumatoid arthritis (RA) can be seen within two to four weeks after seeing a doctor at a peripheral clinic.”



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Front row, from left to right: Nurse Francis Scheepers, Sister Margaret Phillips, Professor Asgar Kalla, Sister Zylvia Pypers, Doctor Trevor Mnguni, Doctor Wesaal Latief, Sister Zuleikha Patel and Sister Ida Top. Backrow, from left to right: Sister Gwen Heydenrych, Sister Joyce Daggert, Melanie Burger, Doctor Nicky Brice, Doctor Lawrence Owino, Doctor Ntsika Nqeketo, Doctor Alan Tooke, Doctor Nur Abrahams and Doctor JR Vermaak.

Professor Kalla says, “The division is world-renowned for its teaching and training activities. I have been involved with the International League Against Rheumatism (ILAR) teaching portfolio and am also a member of the teaching portfolio of the African League Against Rheumatism,” says Professor Kalla, who takes great pride in his team’s publications in reputable journals and every international conference presentation.

Professor Kalla is currently on the Editorial Board of *Clinical Rheumatology*, the ILAR journal and is Editor-in-Chief of the AFLAR *Journal of Rheumatology*. He is also an ex-president of the South African Rheumatism and Arthritis Association (SARAA), a member of the National Action Network (NAN) for the Bone and Joint Decade (BJD) and served as General Secretary for AFLAR.

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“The most exciting thing about working in rheumatology is watching young students and doctors develop proficiency in evaluating musculoskeletal problems. Unfortunately, the musculoskeletal component is neglected in the general medical training and it is essential for registrars and medical officers to have some rotation through rheumatology as part of their overall skills development,” says Professor Kalla.

“It is fascinating to see the evolution of senior registrars over the course of their two years from totally unfamiliar to extremely proficient. Many trainees only appreciate the enormity of the research potential in rheumatology towards the end of their training.

The most challenging aspect of working in rheumatology is the unavailability of certain medications for special needs in patients with rheumatoid arthritis,” reveals Professor Kalla. “The legacy that I would like to leave behind is one of collegiality, approachability and friendliness, combined with excellence in teaching, research and service delivery.”