

TRIBUTE TO MARJORIE CONCHA (NEÉ COLLIN)

9 February 1940 - 30 January 2021

Marjorie Concha, an Occupational Therapist who shaped our profession nationally and internationally, passed away after a long and bravely fought illness on 30 January 2021. She is particularly celebrated for her unbroken service to the Occupational Therapy Association of South Africa (OTASA) as an office bearer for over 50 years. In 1965 Marj, as she was affectionately known to her friends and colleagues, volunteered as secretary of the South African Association of Occupational Therapists (SAAOT now OTASA), serving in various capacities until December 2020. Seminally associated with virtually every advance in professional development during her career, her legacy continues to impact health care in South Africa.

In 2007, Marj took on the position of Editor in Chief of the South African Journal of Occupational Therapy (SAJOT). During her tenure of 10 years in this position, her dedication, leadership and passion for quality research, developed the SAJOT from a paper-based local publication to a nationally and internationally recognised, open-access, peer-reviewed and online journal system. In 2017 – due to ill health – Marj stepped down as Editor in Chief, but remained actively involved in the management of the Journal until January 2021.

The many leadership roles Marj performed are also enshrined in her service to our professional associations. She was an active member of OTASA from 1963 and subsequently served in a range of executive and committee positions including as delegate to the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) and as chair of the WFOT Education Committee. Marj was also a delegate to the Professional Board for Occupational Therapy (SAMDC) and a founder member and chairperson of Occupational Therapy Africa Regional Group (OTARG). The context of her representation often required sensitivity and exceptional leadership skills and fortitude. One such task was establishing the parameters of our profession within the SAMDC, and further, the formulation of the OTASA statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa.

Marj travelled widely assisting foreign universities with curriculum development on behalf of WFOT. Within Africa she presented courses in Botswana, Ethiopia and Tanzania and is well known internationally for her ground breaking work at Tintswalo, South Africa.

Graduating in 1962, Marj gained clinical skills through practice and professional courses both in South Africa and abroad. These informed her subsequent vision and activism in the Community Rehabilitation, Research and Education (CORRE) programme at Tintswalo as well as other projects such as the South African Institute for Sensory Integration (SAISI), aimed at ensuring that rehabilitative health services are available to all, and particularly to children.

In 1968, Marj Concha began her academic career at the University of the Witwatersrand and held the position of HOD in OT from 1974 until her retirement in 2002. She guided the department in introducing BSc, MSc and PhD degrees and was member and chairperson of a range of faculty committees which enabled opportunities to advance the profession in significant ways, for example, The Professionalism and Ethics Committee and The Dean's Committee Against Apartheid. In 1989 she was appointed Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, the first woman and non-medical professional to hold this position.



Marj Concha

Marj Concha's stellar career has surely added to the constellation of individuals who have shaped the excellence of occupational therapy in South Africa. In addition to existing Honorary Life Memberships of OTASA and SAISI, in December 2020 the EXCO nominated Marj Concha for an Honorary Merit Award acknowledging her exceptional contributions.

This issue of the SAJOT is dedicated to Marj, in recognition of her significant and selfless contribution to our profession.