



## Graham Fieggen, ISPN president 2017–2018

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Graham Fieggen

Graham Fieggen, ISPN president 2017–2018, was born and raised in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. He studied Medicine at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in the Apartheid years of South Africa. His mother Janet, a schoolteacher, instilled a sense of social justice which drove him to become involved early on in student politics to effect change, a commitment that he continued in his later career as a convenor of the medical undergraduate program at UCT and mentor for students. After graduating, he spent time in Canada and in England, where he completed a Master of Science degree with distinction at the University of London, nurturing his desire to study neuroscience. He then returned to South Africa to train in Neurosurgery at the University of Cape Town under the tutelage of Professor JC De Villiers and Professor Jonathan Peter, a past president of the ISPN and a mentor for Graham's development as a paediatric neurosurgeon and leader. For several years, Graham ran the only dedicated paediatric neurosurgical service in Sub-Saharan Africa at the Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town.

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His MD thesis, in keeping with the later evolution of his vision for Africa, was on the development of a low-cost stereotactic device that was accurate, but affordable for resource-constrained environments, demonstrating his early awareness of the neurosurgical need in low- and middle-income countries long before global neurosurgery became a buzzword in our profession. Today, he remains at the forefront of initiatives to train and equip neurosurgeons in underserved areas of the world.

In 2008, he began a new chapter in his career when he became the Helen and Morris Mauberger Professor and Head of Neurosurgery at UCT, and then later Head of the Department of Surgery in 2017. While doing this, he has been the project leader and Director of the new Neuroscience Institute at UCT, an exciting initiative launched in 2016 as the first neuroscience centre on the African continent. The building will formally open its doors at the end of 2019 but has already created many opportunities for young researchers to develop their careers in neuroscience for Africa.

Through all this, Graham still somehow worked to galvanise support across Africa for the creation of CAANS, the Continental Association of African Neurosurgical Societies. He was instrumental in enabling this new body, no mean feat given the challenge of a continent comprising 54 geographically, culturally and linguistically diverse countries. In recognition of his efforts, he was elected as the inaugural president of the society. He has maintained the impetus for Africa in the WFNS, as the past chair of the Paediatric Neurosurgery section and the current second vice president for Africa, and as the continental vice president for the World Society for Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery. He is also the current president of the Society of Neurosurgeons of South Africa.

Clearly, this would be enough for a few lifetimes, but somehow in the midst of it all, he has managed to remain grounded and values above all his personal relationships with the people around him, near and far. Chief of these relationships, of course, has been his immediate family. He married his lifelong partner, the geneticist Karen Fieggen, in 1995 and together they raised two sons, Joshua and Liam, of whom they



Graham with Liam, Karen and Joshua

are tremendously proud. Their sons are both students at UCT, studying Medicine and Computer Science/English respectively. Karen, Joshua and Liam speak of how, despite his many commitments and achievements, Graham has remained first and foremost a dedicated and committed husband and father.

In his time, Graham has left a strong African imprint on the ISPN. Many still talk of the landmark 2008 ISPN meeting he hosted in Cape Town, a first on Sub-Saharan African soil, and a meeting that those present will never forget. As the keynote speaker at that meeting, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, said to the collected group of ISPN members as they waved their percussion instruments and found their African roots, *We are who we are through each other, I am because we are.*

It is this spirit of Ubuntu, this humanity towards others, that drives Graham Fieggen as a paediatric neurosurgeon, teacher, advocate for children, leader, and unique human being. Through mentorship, Graham has nurtured a strong group of paediatric neurosurgeons in Cape Town to build on the foundations he and Jonathan Peter laid. Through leadership, he has enabled a new generation of neurosurgeons in Africa to forge an exciting future for the continent.

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