



## **B D Schoub**

**James Gear Fellow: 1977/1978**

**Laboratories of Infectious Diseases, National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, USA.**

**Research programme: Research into Rotavirus – the major cause of infantile gastroenteritis.**

I was the first recipient of the James Gear fellowship in 1977/1978. The fellowship was utilised to enable me to spend a year in the Laboratory of Infectious Diseases (LID) at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, USA.

The LID was headed by Dr. Robert Chanock, the scientist who discovered *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* an important cause of respiratory infection and pneumonia. My supervisor was Dr. Albert Kapikian, the head of the gastroenteritis laboratory of LID.

Rotavirus is the most important single pathogen causing infantile gastroenteritis which, is one of the most important causes of infant mortality due to an infectious agent. The virus was first discovered in Australia in 1973, and cutting-edge research was being carried out in the laboratories of Dr. Kapikian in the USA. He was an internationally renowned expert who, some five years previously, had also discovered norovirus the most common cause of gastroenteritis in individuals of all ages, and hepatitis A virus

The James Gear Fellowship enabled me to have the experience of working with some of the world experts in the rotavirus field —including Dr. Kapikian, Dr. Harry Greenberg, Dr. Richard Wyatt and Dr. Bob Wyatt — all well-known names who pioneered rotavirus research. I was able to carry out original research in partnership with these world authorities in my formative years as a scientist and researcher. The experience was invaluable in launching my subsequent career. Initiating me into the

world of meticulous and productive science. The research I completed in that year enabled me to complete my two senior doctorate theses. Interestingly, The James Gear Fellow of 1990, Duncan Steele, continued with rotavirus research in the same laboratory some 12 years later in 1990.

Returning to South Africa in the latter part of 1978 I was appointed as the first professor and head of the Department of Virology at the University of the Witwatersrand and deputy director of the National Institute for Virology (NIV). In 1982, I became the director of the NIV and in 2000 the founding director of the NICD.

Undoubtedly that early exposure and ability to work in a world-class laboratory in my early formative years was a key factor in launching me on my subsequent research and academic career in Virology. The James Gear Fellowship has undoubtedly been of enormous benefit to the discipline of virology in South Africa by enriching it with individuals who have benefitted from the invaluable experience of working in top-class prestigious facilities abroad. That early exposure of promising young scientists pays enormous dividends as these individuals mature into their scientific research careers.