

Gavin Mooney

Vice Chancellor, I have the great honour to present for the degree of Doctor of Social Science, honoris causa, Gavin Hunter Mooney

Professor Mooney is being awarded this degree on the basis of his exceptional scholarship and contribution to the discipline of health economics, globally, in many individual countries around the world and at our very own University of Cape Town. Although he doesn't like to be referred to in this way, as he thinks it reflects negatively on his age, he is one of the founding fathers of health economics. He was at the forefront of the development of techniques for applying economic theory and principles to the health sector, along with others such as Kenneth Arrow, Alan Williams, Tony Culyer and Michael Drummond. He has been one of the most prolific health economics publishers and has written over 20 books, more than 60 chapters in books and several hundred peer-reviewed journal articles. Essentially, he has the academic credentials to be worthy of this degree.

But, it is not simply the volume of his academic outputs that is noteworthy. Even more important is the nature of the issues that he raises in these publications. Probably Prof. Mooney's most important contribution has been to open up for debate the value base of the health economics discipline. In particular, he has led the way in challenging the prevailing orthodoxy in much of health economics which prioritises concerns with efficiency over the distributional consequences of decisions. His seminal article in 1983, entitled "Equity in health care: confronting the confusion" is still prescribed reading for

health economics students as an entry point to understanding equity issues in the health sector. It is largely as a result of his efforts that the equity-efficiency trade-offs, that are so often an element of health system decision-making, are made explicit and given consideration by health economists. His exploration of the value base of the discipline has culminated in his most recent book released by Oxford University Press earlier this year, "Challenging Health Economics".

His passionate concern for equity and social justice stems from his roots, having been born in Glasgow in bonnie Scotland in 1943 to a schoolteacher father from the Glasgow slums and a mother who was a nurse from rural Scotland. Glasgow is well known for radical working-class politics, as well as instilling a dry, down-to-earth sense of humour.

After school, he started his working life as a trainee actuary in an insurance office. His main memory from that period was playing soccer for the insurance company's team. He soon decided to study Economics, and after working for some time for the Ministry of Transport in London, moved to the Department of Health where he found his home applying economic principles to health sector problems. He moved into academia in 1974, starting off at Aberdeen University and has since held positions at the University of Copenhagen and Aarhus in Denmark, Tromso in Norway, Maastricht in the Netherlands, Wellington in New Zealand, and Sydney, Curtin and the University of New South Wales in Australia.

He is a bit of a traveller, and a friend who seemed to frequently lose touch with him once told me that if you wanted to find Gavin, you had to find out where the

newest distance-learning health economics course had been established. And sure enough, he has initiated distance-learning courses in Scotland, Norway, Australia, and most recently at UCT in South Africa. These programs have been one of the most important educational contributions he has made, in that they have enabled hundreds who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to develop expertise in health economics.

Prof. Mooney has also made a critical contribution by shifting the health economics profession from its largely 'academic' and clinical outlook to embrace a broader social role. He has done this through leading by example in engaging in research which contributes very directly to important health policy decision-making and engaging with policy makers at the highest levels to contribute productively to policy formulation. This has possibly been demonstrated most clearly through his longstanding program of research into the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in Australia. This research has contributed enormously to the debate around the claims that Aboriginal people have on health care resources, which has played a part in the noticeable shift in public sentiment and government policy in Australia towards a more positive view about redressing the inequities that exist in this area.

In recognition of these contributions, he has been adopted into an Aboriginal family in Australia, which is a very unusual and great honour. Within that family he is Uncle Ngulla; the name Ngulla means a tree and he was given this name because he brought life and oxygen to a family struggling with alcohol and drug abuse.

The development of the discipline of health economics within South Africa, and more specifically at UCT, occurred in the late 1980s, which was a period of international isolation. Prof. Mooney's books and articles were some of the few resources that aspiring young health economists in South Africa had access to in developing their understanding of the theoretical and methodological basis for their work. It is in no small part due to Prof. Mooney disseminating his knowledge in accessible forms that the discipline of health economics was able to take root in South Africa

Prof. Mooney's conceptual and methodological contributions have particular relevance to a country such as South Africa. In the context of the magnitude of income, social and health inequalities existing in South Africa, it is critical that efficiency concerns be balanced with equity concerns. Specific analytic tools developed by Prof. Mooney in the Australian context of improving the capacity of Aboriginal communities to effectively absorb health budget increases have been adopted by the South African Department of Health in supporting the development of historically under-resourced districts. This is one example of the direct relevance of Prof. Mooney's work to the South African context.

Prof. Mooney has over the years contributed to mentoring young health economists at UCT, supported the development of a culture of academic publication amongst our staff and enabled staff to develop a positive vision of an academic career.

Throughout his career, Prof Mooney has demonstrated what it means to be a public intellectual, an activist academic, a thinker and a doer.

Vice Chancellor, I have the honour to invite you to admit to the degree of Doctor of Social Science, honoris causa, Gavin Hunter Mooney