

# Top SA Aids scientist Gita Ramjee dies from Covid-19 complications

**Yasantha Naidoo**

Tributes have been pouring in from around the world for internationally acclaimed scientist, academic and women's rights campaigner Prof Gita Ramjee, who died in a Durban hospital of Covid-19 complications on Tuesday.

A family member, who asked not to be named, confirmed Ramjee's death after complications arising from asthma and pneumonia, and that she had been cremated.

He said her husband, Praveen, a well known pharmacist, was "lost" after her death.

At the time of her death, Ramjee worked at health care organisation Aurum Institute, which is regarded as a global authority on HIV and TB prevention and eradication.

In a statement, Aurum Institute group CEO Prof Gavin Churchyard said: "The Aurum Institute and the global HIV research community will mourn Gita Ramjee's passing and celebrate the huge contribution to the response to HIV she made in her life.

"Gita firmly believed in health as a fundamental human right.

"Her groundbreaking research in HIV prevention contributed to the global



**WIDELY MOURNED:** Internationally acclaimed HIV scientist and women's rights campaigner Prof Gita Ramjee died in a Durban hospital

response to HIV and Aids.

"Our thoughts during this difficult time are with her family, colleagues and the many people her life and work touched."

Her death was mourned by several of her former colleagues, including Prof Glenda Gray at the SA Medical Re-

search Council, where she worked as chief specialist scientist and director of the HIV Prevention Research Unit at the SA Medical Research Council.

Gray issued a memo to staff of the "tragic passing of Prof Gita Ramjee in hospital".

"Prof Ramjee died of Covid-

19 related complications."

Leading SA clinical infectious diseases epidemiologist Prof Salim Abdool Karim, who took Ramjee under his wing at the SAMRC, said he was devastated by Ramjee's death.

"She was a leading Aids researcher who was the epitome of a professional.

"Gita reflected the kind of commitment that saw her rise through the ranks to her international acclaim."

He said he had wanted to visit her in hospital on Monday but had been told by staff that she was in isolation and could not receive visitors.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal also issued a communique to staff and students informing them of the death of their former colleague after travelling abroad.

She was acclaimed in the field of HIV prevention clinical trials and was acknowledged internationally for her expertise in the field of microbicide research, including a Lifetime Achievement Award for HIV Prevention.

In 2018, she was honoured with the "Outstanding Female Scientist" award by the European Development Clinical Trials Partnerships (EDCTP) for her work focusing on finding new HIV prevention methods.

— TimesLIVE