

A Pause with a PLASTIC SURGEON



PAOLA CHELLEW chats to renowned plastic and reconstructive surgeon

DR VIVIEN JANDERA about how she juggles her personal life and a busy work schedule.



Training and teaching are among Dr Jandera's passions

PC: When did you know for certain that you wanted to study medicine? Was there a moment in time, or did you gradually come to realise that you wanted to follow a career in medicine?

Dr VJ I had measles when I was six years old. Our family GP had a new young partner in the days when GPs still did housecalls. He popped in every couple of days to check on me – and that's when I decided that I wanted to be a doctor when I grew up. I never thought of doing anything else.

Out of interest, he is retired now and still sees patients voluntarily in old age homes. He was, and still is a legend, as well as being our family GP until he retired.

I studied medicine at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and I did my GP training time with him in his practice!

As a young graduate, where did you first practice?

I did my internship at Victoria Hospital in Wynberg, Cape Town, and then worked there in Casualty and Surgery for a few years afterwards.

Later, I went to work as a GP in small town in Canada for a while – it was the way South African doctors paid off their student loans in those days.

What made you decide to go into plastic surgery?

It is just the most fascinating and

fast growing field in medicine. It encompasses both aesthetic and reconstructive surgery. Plastic surgeons work on all parts of the body and on all ages of patients.

It was also really difficult to get a registrar post in that department, so I had to try! It was a challenge. I was the first woman to be given a post to specialise in plastic surgery at UCT.

What is your favourite procedure? Breast reduction is definitely my favourite operation – not because of the actual surgery, but because it's just so life-changing for the patient. I think it is so wrong that most medical aids won't fund this procedure!

I also love non-surgical procedures like neurotoxin and dermal fillers – there's so much that can be done without surgery and I think my plastic surgery training adds another dimension to my understanding of facial aesthetics.

Who has been inspirational to you? When I started in plastic surgery there weren't many female role models around.

But there's a plastic surgeon in Canada – Dr Elizabeth Hall Findley. She's a brilliant breast surgeon, writes chapters in our textbooks, is an amazing teacher, but is so humble and unassuming. Apparently she used

to sneak out of the back door of her rooms in the afternoons to watch her children play sport. The patients in her rooms used to think she was in the hospital next door and the hospital patients used to think she was in her rooms!

She probably doesn't even know how inspirational she is to me.

You were elected president of APRASSA (the Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons of Southern Africa) in 2018 (first woman to be elected) and served for two years. Tell us why the association is so essential, as well as what your role meant to you.

I hit the jackpot! I managed to be president of APRASSA through the first 18 months of the Covid pandemic. It was a really busy time with all the regulations and limitations. There were rules regarding when doctors could work, what they were allowed to do, getting permits to drive anywhere out of curfew hours and the list goes on. Doctors were very stressed, so that time was hectic!

I think APRASSA is so important for plastic surgery. It is a group of like-minded professionals with similar goals and ethics, setting standards for excellence in our profession in this country.

You are also a member of ISAPS (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery), and ASPS (American Society of Plastic Surgery) – tell us more about these organisations as well as your role in them.

It's vital that South African plastic surgeons collaborate with other societies and countries.

They have valuable education programmes, and far more financial resources than we have. However, interacting with them makes one realise that we are really up there with the best of them. South African doctors are still highly regarded all over the world.

You make time to train other doctors – when did your love of teaching start?

I'm not sure where or how that started, but that's really my passion. I feel so strongly that I only am where I am because people took time to teach me. I've been training on behalf of a dermal filler company for many years. I love being able to break down something and explain it – so that someone else can understand it better. It really gives me a buzz!

I even went back to teaching at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University for five years from 2012 to 2017. But working in the state sector is difficult...

It must be challenging to find time for yourself and family. Do you make a concerted effort to get away or take time out to be with your loved ones?

Family and my friends are everything to me. I'm a bit of a workaholic, but I do try to take time out over parts of the weekend.

Apart from the medical field, what do you love doing?

I love travelling and have been privileged to travel quite a bit. Apparently I'm also not a bad cook – I also enjoy that if I have the time! ⁴²



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Dr Jandera presenting at a congress