

By one definition a saga is “a long story of heroic achievement”. This may be a most apt description of what Tim Noakes and his family has been through over the last four years.

The appeal by the Health Professions Council of South Africa's team in the trial of Prof Noakes on a charge of unprofessional conduct for a single tweet has been finally quashed.

"The argument of the Appellant (HPCSA) that the Respondent (Prof Noakes) provided unconventional advice of breast feeding babies is not persuasive and is rejected. Wherefore, it is the unanimous decision of the members of the appeal committee that the appeal be dismissed”.

So reads the judgment, issued on Friday June 9, 2018, of the HPCSA's Appeal Committee.

In September 2017, in the Cape Doctor, Prof JP van Niekerk superbly summarized the events leading up to the trial and some of the consequences of the outcome. With the failure of the appeal, finally after nearly four and a half years, this sorry saga seems to have ended.

However, should it indeed end here?

There are so many threads to this rather dark tale of what can truly be called intrigue. There are all the usual suspects of relationship loyalties, stretching back decades in some instances, professional jealousies and of course money, in the form of big pharma and the sugar industry and in the case of the latter, one cannot but wonder whether some of the main players accusing Prof Noakes, were indeed "captured" to serve their benefactors?

Thus, one should question the motivation for senior members of the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) to write the letter to the Cape Times (see more below), which was not formally endorsed by anyone else in the FHS but only by the 4 signatories, the Dean, the Professor of Medicine, a retired but prominent cardiologist and the head of dietetics and nutrition. The letter purported to be prompted by concern for the health and wellbeing of patients but seemed really aimed at undermining Prof Noakes' academic credentials and reputation.

What prompted the formal complaint on the tweet that only reiterated dietary guidelines supported by the person who made the complaint to the HPCSA and the and very same organization she represented ?

Why was the complaint of unprofessional conduct supported by past senior FHS members for the HPCSA to proceed and charge Prof Noakes?

Lurking in the shadows behind all this were Big Pharma and those with vested interests in the sugar and cereal food industries. The precipitating event seems to have been a presentation that Prof Noakes gave to a select committee of parliament, where he had promoted the low carbohydrate high fat (LCHF) diet and as a corollary supported a sugar tax as one way of combating South Africa's obesity and type 2 diabetes epidemic.

One should emphasize that this "campaign" against Prof Noakes which amounted to academic mobbing, was tacitly supported by the UCT hierarchy. The letter to the Cape Times must have been seen and endorsed by the UCT Vice Chancellor at the time, for it to have gone forward to publication.

What is disgraceful is that the University chose to publicly disown one of its most prominent, productive and indeed renowned NRF, A rated scientists with an h index of 71 and more than 16,000 citations, who over his many years at the UCT had contributed hugely to the financial and material benefit of the institution. Prof Noakes, in taking a strong position on the LCHF diet had indeed challenged the FHS to scientifically test the efficacy of a dietary intervention, which could have an enormous potential for health benefit. The FHS chose not to take up this challenge. Was he now considered a liability?

Prof Noakes's promotion of the LCHF diet plan has had a hugely beneficial effect on the health of a great many of those in need of help, who have enthusiastically adopted it. There is no doubt that the ketogenic LCHF diet has a very significant role to play in addressing not only specific disease states, such as insulin resistant diabetes, epilepsy and potentially many other conditions from infertility to depression but also on a much greater scale against the so-called "syndemic" of malnutrition and obesity, which are devastating the people of this continent of Africa.

Prof Noakes, having been totally vindicated in the trial on all counts, has yet to receive any public acknowledgement from the UCT FHS of this vindication or any private or public apology.

One of the extraordinary aspects of the vitriolic antagonism to some of Prof Noakes's statements on the effects of the LCHF diet and his opinion on the lack of benefit from statins and the lack of evidence of the cholesterol causation of atherosclerosis and heart disease, is how rarely have individuals confronted him in private or public debate.

The Health Science Faculty has been in turmoil since even before the tragic death of its Dean, Bongani Mayosi, one of its brightest stars, and the resignation, retirement or absence on sick leave of some key leaders within the Faculty, as well as important supporting staff in the Deanery and has rightly asked for an in-depth review with a view to possible restructuring. There is the expectation that much good will come of this.

However, the role of the major players within South African academia, the HPCSA and in the organizations related to dietetics in hounding Prof Noakes, has still to be fully explored.

MarikaSboros, an investigative journalist and co-author of Noakes' book, *Lore of Nutrition, Challenging Conventional Dietary Beliefs*, gives a startling exposé on the behind-the-scenes intrigue that tried to malign and discredit one of our most remarkable and esteemed colleagues.

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Written in my private capacity by invitation of the editor and as a supporter of the huge need for dietary improvement of South Africa's predominantly young population.

Now that the medico-legal dust has settled on the curious case of the Health Professions Council of South Africa's hearing against Prof Tim Noakes it leaves many lessons in its wake for medical doctors.

The case ended in a complete vindication for Noakes, first after the HPCSA's own Professional Conduct Committee ruled him not guilty in April 2017, on all 10 aspects of a charge of unprofessional conduct – that arose from a single tweet Noakes made in 2014. He was vindicated again after the HPCSA's appeal committee confirmed the not-guilty verdict in full in June 2018.

Perhaps the most disturbing of lessons still to be learned is that the dark art of academic bullying is alive and well in South Africa. Also known as academic mobbing, the HPCSA hearing showed that it reaches deep into the heart of all of this country's top universities – and at the highest levels.

The University of Cape Town tops the list with the most academic bullies or "mobsters" with Stellenbosch University a close second and the University of the Witwatersrand and North-West University not far behind.

Just as disturbing is the deafening silence from all the universities involved that continues to this day.

Noakes has called it an omertà – the oath of secrecy that Mafia members swear not to reveal details of their criminal activities or to co-operate with the police. The comparison with organised crime is not inappropriate or even hyperbolic in this case.

The evidence for an omertà and the mobbing is on public record in the hearing transcripts and documents. It is also documented in *Lore of Nutrition, Challenging Conventional Dietary Beliefs*, published by Penguin 2017 (of which I am privileged to be co-author with Prof Noakes).

Among distinguishing features of the mobbing of Noakes is how organised it was; how many medical doctors and dietitians were involved; how many professors of one medical discipline or another participated; that deans of medical schools and even vice chancellors were involved;

All because they disagreed with his scientific opinions on diet and nutrition. Actually, not just on diet and nutrition but also food as medicine, as an alternative to drugs to treat and prevent obesity, type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Even that's not all. One of the biggest triggers for mobbing Noakes has proved to be his opinion on statin drugs and the diet-heart hypothesis that saturated fat causes heart disease, on which the blockbuster, billion-dollar drugs rest. Noakes shares the evidence-based opinion with many cardiologists and cardiovascular researchers worldwide that the diet-heart hypothesis is not evidence-based. That's a message that infuriates cardiologists who support conventional "wisdom" on cholesterol and the drug industry that continues to profit massively from it.

Of course, cardiologists and others have the right to hold and express opinions differing from Prof Noakes. Just not to try to mob, discredit and destroy him for holding those opinions.

The grim reality of academic mobbing is it is not restricted to South African universities. It is a global phenomenon of academic "hit jobs". The consequences can be fatal, as the tragic case of Canadian neurology and neurosurgery professor Justine Sergent at McGill University showed. Sergent's colleagues started mobbing her in 1992. In 1994, she and her husband were found seated next to each other in their car in a suicide pact, dead from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Last year, former poet laureate of Canada Brad Cran wrote an article on academic mobbing in *Quillette* (an influential website offering a "platform for free thought"), headlined *The*

Academic Mob and Its Fatal Toll. It's a riveting, disturbing read that includes the work of Canadian Kenneth Westhues, an internationally recognised authority on academic mobbing and an emeritus professor of sociology at the University of Waterloo professor emeritus of sociology.

Westhues [defines academic mobbing as](#): “[A]n impassioned, collective campaign by co-workers (or academic colleagues in this case), to exclude, punish, and humiliate a targeted worker. Initiated most often by a person in a position of power or influence, mobbing is a desperate urge to crush and eliminate the target.

“The urge travels through the (academic institution) like a virus, infecting one person after another. The target comes to be viewed as absolutely abhorrent, with no redeeming qualities, outside the circle of acceptance and respectability, deserving only of contempt.

“As the campaign proceeds, a steadily larger range of hostile ploys and communications comes to be seen as legitimate.”

He could have been writing about the mobbing of Noakes.

Noakes never came close to contemplating suicide – but that's more by luck than good judgment on the part of the academic mobsters. The many distinguishing features and extent of the mobbing of Noakes gives it the dubious distinction as one of the most egregious examples of the ugly phenomenon globally, to date.

Noakes has written and spoken eloquently of his despair and distress at the treatment colleagues and peers meted out to him. He describes it as "unfathomable cruelty" that took him to "some very dark places". He has felt particularly betrayed by UCT, his alma mater, a university he served with distinction for decades. Were it not for the love and support of his family, particularly his wife, Marilyn, friends and the few brave medical doctors who did speak up for him, Noakes might not have survived the mobbing relatively unscathed as he was able to do.

So, it is disturbing – or should be – for doctors to know just how many of their colleagues ganged up on Noakes. And that leaders of their voluntary association, the South African Medical Association (SAMA) were also involved. After all, the medical profession, by definition, is supposed to be a caring one. There was nothing caring about how so many prominent medical doctors went after Noakes in organised gangs, attacking

Dr Max Price, VC of UCT at the time, has dismissed the mobbing throughout as "robust scientific debate" to which UCT was committed. It's hard to see anything robust or close to scientific "debate" in attempts by so many academics to eviscerate Noakes's distinguished career and scientific legacy built up over decades.

Among the many distinguishing features of the mobbing is how many [UCT cardiologists](#) lay at its heart (pun intended). They made it open season on Noakes with their "open letter" published in the Cape Times in 2012. In it they accuse him of going against the Hippocratic oath, of being a cholesterol "denialist" and a "danger to the public" – all without providing any evidence.

The authors were Patrick Commerford, at the time professor of cardiology and head of the cardiac clinic at UCT and Groote Schuur Hospital, Mpiko Ntsekhe, of the cardiac clinic at UCT and Groote Schuur, Dirk Blom, of the lipid clinic at UCT and Groote Schuur, David Marais (of chemical pathology and clinical laboratory services at UCT's Health Science Faculty), and UCT-trained Cape Town cardiologists Elwyn Lloyd and Adrian Horak.

They accused Noakes of going against the Hippocratic Oath, and being a cholesterol "denialist" and a "danger to the public". Johannesburg cardiologist Dr Anthony Dalby is also on public record calling Noakes's views on statins and cholesterol "criminal".

One would think that, given their elevated status and knowledge base, at least one of these experts would know that before it is possible to claim that cholesterol *causes* heart disease, there must be evidence for a clear and consistent relationship between cholesterol and heart disease. Noakes joins many other reliable scientific voices across the globe who say that if there *is* such a relationship, the evidence actually shows that it is inverse: in other words, "high cholesterol is associated with lower heart disease and vice versa".

Two years later, more UCT academics followed suit in another open letter to the media. The authors of the now infamous 2014 "[UCT Academics Letter](#)" were: Prof Wim de Villiers, dean of UCT Faculty of Health Sciences, now rector and vice-chancellor of Stellenbosch University, Prof Bongani Mayosi, (now deceased) head of UCT Department of Medicine and later dean of the Medical School, Prof Lionel Opie, emeritus UCT cardiology professor, and Dr Marjanne Senekal, associate professor and head of UCT Division of Human Nutrition. Mayosi died by suicide last year after battling depression but also after relentless mobbing by UCT students that may very well have contributed to his premature death.

In that letter, the authors claim that Noakes was making "outrageous, unproven claims about disease prevention" – without providing any evidence to support their claims. An email chain of correspondence shows that one of the main drivers of the letter along with Senekal was UCT Health Science Faculty's communications and marketing manager Linda Rhoda, wife of UCT Council member advocate Norman Arendse.

Senekal's conduct is another distinguishing feature that makes the mobbing so egregious: Despite being Noakes's colleague in UCT's Health Sciences Faculty, later became a consultant to the HPCSA against him in November 2015. That was once it became clear that terminal wounds were opening up in the case against him. UCT has stayed mum on the ethics or appropriateness of that.

Senekal was also a co-author of a controversial study published in the PLoS One journal in 2014 known as the *Naudé Review*, after lead author, Dr Celeste Naudé, a nutrition academic at Stellenbosch University. Another co-author is Stellenbosch dean of the School of Medicine and Faculty Health Sciences Prof Jimmy Volmink, a UCT graduate.

Noakes and British public health researcher Dr Zoë Harcombe published their own analysis of the *Naudé Review* in the *SAMJ* in December 2016. They found it to be so riddled with errors and design flaws as to undermine the conclusions. Noakes and Harcombe stopped short of accusing the *Naudé Review* authors of "scientific fraud". Instead, they asked whether so many eminent researchers committed many honest mistakes or "mischief"?

That question and calls for retraction of the study remain unanswered.

Volmink's involvement in the mobbing is also significant and mirrors that of another of his friends, UCT graduate Prof Jacques Rossouw, now with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the US. Both are staunch critics of Noakes and took part in the so-called UCT Centenary "Debate" in December 2012. It turned out to be no so much a debate as a mobbing exercise, a kangaroo court aimed at humiliating Noakes and discrediting his views in public on diet and statins.

Rossouw came close to giving expert witness against Prof Noakes at the very last minute in the HPCSA's case but failed to turn up on the day of the penultimate hearing in February 2016. Rossouw declined to answer emails on why he made the dramatic turn-around. All the

NIH would say is that it "could not give him permission in time" to be a witness. Yet Rossouw was in Cape Town visiting friends in late January 2016, among them UCT professor of medicine Krisela Steyn whose research involves highlighting the increasing burden of chronic diseases and their risk factors in developing countries.

Steyn's friend is UCT clinical endocrinologist and diabetologist Prof Naomi "Dinky" Levitt, who heads the Division of Diabetic Medicine and Endocrinology at Groote Schuur Hospital. Levitt has been integrally involved in the development of guidelines for patients with diabetes nationally, regionally and internationally over the past decade. Her antipathy towards Prof Noakes is no real surprise, since his research and evidence-based opinions on best treatment options for diabetics are diametrically opposed to hers.

Both Steyn and Levitt are on public record attacking Noakes and his scientific opinions.

Another distinguishing feature of the mobbing of Noakes is that in the case of Rossouw, it is very much a family affair. His son, Jacques Rousseau (sic), a junior lecturer in UCT's Commerce faculty, has to date written more than 30 vicious blogs attacking Noakes and accusing him of practising "pseudoscience" – despite not being a scientist or having any qualification in nutrition. (Spelling his last name differently from his father helped to hide his connection with his father for a few years.)

And while it's hard to single out the most shocking of the many disturbing distinguishing features of the mobbing, it's hard not to see the conduct of Wits University head of medical bioethics Prof Amaboo "Ames" Dhai, of all people, as especially disturbing.

It is common cause by now that the HPCSA charged Noakes with unprofessional conduct for a single tweet saying that good first foods for infants are LCHF (low-carb, high-fat). And that his tweet so "horrified" Johannesburg dietitian, Claire Julsing Strydom, that she reported him to the HPCSA within hours.

Anyone who knows anything at all about LCHF for infants knows that it means meat fish, eggs, chicken and dairy. That opinion also aligns perfectly with South Africa's paediatric guidelines as well as international paediatric guidelines, as Strydom and the HPCSA's own expert witnesses conceded under cross-examination. Strydom also conceded that she dishes up the same advice to clients these days. So does the Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA), of which she was president when she first reported Noakes to the HPCSA.

Dhai chaired the HPCSA's Fourth Preliminary Committee of Inquiry – its first port of call when considering complaints against medical practitioners. (Fourth denotes the HPCSA's committee comprising medical doctors.) On the committee with her were UCT surgery professor John Terblanche and psychiatry professor Denise White (now deceased) – all were or had been SAMA office bearers.

The task of the committee was simple enough: consider Strydom's complaint, give Noakes an opportunity to respond and then decide whether the HPCSA should charge him and if so, with what. Thereafter, the committee members were *functus officio* – the legal term for "their job was done". In other words, they should have taken off their HPCSA hats and gone back to their day jobs as medical academics. Instead, Dhai and Terblanche put on their thinking caps to indulge in what Prof Noakes's legal team has called "highly irregular conduct". That's a euphemism for highly unethical conduct, according to the HPCSA's own rules as laid down by the Health Professions Act.

Dhai did give Noakes an opportunity to respond but appeared not to like his response. However, she had no evidence whatsoever on which to base a decision to charge him at that stage. Therefore, instead of concluding that there was no case against him, Dhai went looking for evidence. That was her right, of course, if she genuinely believed that he was a danger to the public as Strydom was claiming. Dhai commissioned a report from the one academic she must have known was likely to write something highly critical of Prof Noakes, NorthWest University nutrition academic Prof Hester "Este" Vorster, a friend of Strydom's.

Vorster's antipathy to LCHF is well-known as are her links to the sugar industry. Vorster is also author of South Africa's high-carb, low-fat guidelines – the ones from which processed food, soft drink and drug industries continue to benefit massively. The guidelines that robust research has shown were without any scientific evidence to back them up when the US first launched them onto an unsuspecting public in 1977, and the rest of the English-language world followed suit shortly thereafter. That scientific status quo remains.

Vorster also wrote a key recommendation in the guidelines that persists to this day: that we should all "make starchy foods the basis of all meals". Vorster and her university have declined all emailed requests for scientific justification for that recommendation. Or for why she decided to become an expert witness against Noakes.

And while the hearing was supposed to be all about a tweet about infant nutrition, it quickly became clear what the real target was - apart from Noakes himself. It was LCHF for people of all ages because it represents a clear and present danger to the reputations of doctors and dietitians who have preached and continue to preach the benefits of low-fat, high-carb diets to treat and prevent chronic disease – and, of course, to the profit margins of processed food, soft drinks and drug industries that feed off conventional dietary "wisdom". It's probably no coincidence that among the ties that bind many of those involved in mobbing Noakes, including Vorster and Senekal are long-term links with a shadowy organisation called [ILSI \(International Life Sciences Institute\)](#), a front first for Coca Cola, then Kellogg's

It is reasonable, therefore, to think that Dhai should have known that Vorster was heavily conflicted and thus not a reliable source of evidence against Noakes. Which makes Dhai's conduct thereafter more surprising – for a professor of ethics.

After she procured Vorster's report, Dhai did the unthinkable: she kept the report secret from Noakes before using it to base her committee's decision that the HPCSA should charge him with unprofessional conduct. By doing that, Dhai breached the HPCSA's own rules, Noakes's constitutional rights and the common law principle, *audi alteram partem* (let the other side be heard). In other words, the principle that all accused persons have the right to see all evidence against them and respond to it before being charged.

The evidence for Dhai's conduct showed up in an incriminating series of emails that fell into the hands of Prof Noakes's eagle-eyed defence team quite by chance during the November 2015 hearing. The emails are on public record and documented in *Lore of Nutrition*. In one email, Dhai tells the HPCSA legal team to bring in outside lawyers because she doesn't believe they are up to the task of prosecuting him successfully (not in so many words, but that's the gist). In another email, Terblanche goes beyond his remit as a committee member to helpfully offer to secure the services of "expert" witnesses against him, including De Villiers. As it turned out, De Villiers did not give evidence against Noakes. He has declined to say whether Terblanche ever asked him and he declined - and if so, why.

With that, Dhai set off the HPCSA's hearing against Noakes and the HPCSA quickly became a vehicle for spreading even more mobbing of Noakes. The public quickly dubbed the hearing the "Nutrition Trial of the 21st Century". Others called it an "inquisition", a farce and "Kafkaesque" for the many twists and turns - and how long it took. After all, HPCSA hearings are not supposed to be adversarial. They are supposed to be "dispassionate inquiries into the truth of the matter". Legal experts have noted that there was nothing dispassionate about the HPCSA's hearing. It was adversarial from the start and became even more so once the HPCSA took on an expensive team of outside lawyers after it became clear its case had developed gaping and terminal holes. The HPCSA prosecution team was bumped up to include Cape Town medical doctor-turned advocate Ajay Bhoopchand and Johannesburg instructing attorney Katlego Mmuoe, of KK Mmuoe Attorneys.

The HPCSA appeared to have taken a leaf straight out of the book of Noakes's A-team of lawyers. On his team were instructing attorney Adam Pike, of Pike Law was Johannesburg advocate Michael van der Nest (SC) included Pietermaritzburg medical doctor-turned advocate Ravin "Rocky" Ramdass, a physician with more than 23 years' experience in family medicine.

Co-opting outside lawyers and stretching the hearing out over more than four years sent the HPCSA's costs into the stratosphere – conservatively estimated at more than R10-million. Noakes's legal costs would have been similarly high had Van der Nest and Ramdass not offered their services pro bono from the start – so certain were they that he was the victim of a set-up and that the case against him had no merit from the outset.

Dhai has refused all requests for comment on and justification for her conduct as committee chair, apart from to say, through Wits VC Prof Adam Habib, that she was involved in "no wrongdoing". Similarly, all the universities involved and the HPCSA refused to comment before, during and after the hearing.

The list of mobster protagonists in this strange saga is lengthy but certainly not exhaustive. In the closing chapter of *Lore of Nutrition*, the authors say that it is tempting to think that it is surely not possible for so many medical doctors, academics and dietitians to be out of step except Noakes. They give all the evidence to show that it is not just possible, as anything is, it is also highly probable.

The authors also speculate whether the HPCSA hearing could have happened at all were it not for the "incestuous web of UCT academics" that spread rapidly to other universities.

They are not saying that all those who mobbed Noakes are mad or bad. Some may very well be mad or bad – there are rogues in all professions. But many, if not most, probably acted out of ignorance (one would like to give them the benefit of the doubt), in thrall of their beliefs unfettered by scientific evidence – and fear for their reputations, careers and funding.

The Upton Sinclair quote is apt here: "It's difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on him not understanding it."

That leads to an important last lesson for medical doctors: the unedifying reality that so few were brave enough to raise their heads above the parapet and speak up publicly for Prof Noakes. Which brings to mind a variation of Pastor Niemoller's famous poem about the cowardice of German intellectuals following the Nazi's rise to power and the purging of chosen targets, one by one:

"First, they came for the cardiologists and I did not speak out because I was not a cardiologist ...".

Among those brave enough to speak up was UCT emeritus professor of paediatrics Max Klein (now deceased). In 2014, Klein sent a lengthy, impassioned email to De Villiers, then Dean of UCT Medical School, under the subject heading: *Bias and distasteful vilification of Noakes*.

Klein protested "in the strongest terms" firstly about what he saw as "the biased presentation of 'facts' on (the) web page which is the guise of informing debate is aimed at discrediting Noakes". Klein was referring to a page on UCT's website titled *The Big Fat Debate* that Senekal and Rousseau junior are said to have put together (neither is confirming that on the record). The web page is anything but a debate since it promotes only one side of one of the most contentious issues in nutrition science: establishment, conventional low-fat, high-carb dietary advice. Noakes's opinions and published responses to the criticisms presented on the website are still not included.

Thus, it ends up as just more proof that under De Villiers, UCT's Faculty of Health Science had indeed turned its back on open debate and freedom of academic speech, at least for some. Instead, it appeared that only information favourable to vested industry interests would be allowed on the UCT medical campus. (In *Lore of Nutrition*, Prof Noakes and I have drawn attention to the long-standing dependence De Villiers' career has had on the largesse of the pharmaceutical industry.)

Klein also took aim at the UCT Academics Letter in 2014. "I find the letter distasteful," he wrote. "It diminishes the Faculty's stature and credibility. That latter was ostensibly sent on behalf of the Faculty but in fact it merely expresses the personal views of the authors." To De Villiers, Klein said bluntly: "Your signature gives it a deceptive cloak of authority."

Klein ascribed the attacks on Noakes as the result of egos that had been "badly bruised" by his "temerity" as an A-graded sports scientist "nogal" (as Klein put it) to "seize the initiative in a field others see as their private reserve".

Klein went on to say that an important lesson from the history of science is that advances often come from people "in parallel fields" rather than "experts" in a particular field: "Experts have their status on the basis of past knowledge and achievement and are often too set in their ways of thinking about a problem to be able to see it in a different light."

Klein has more to say, and his email is well worth a read – especially for cardiologists. (You can find it in full on pages 105 to 108 of *Lore of Nutrition*.) He received no reply to his email from De Villiers. De Villiers declined to say why.

Another who braved the wrath of colleagues was GP Dr Rosalind Arland. In response to the UCT Academics' letter, she wrote a letter to the media: "As a graduate of UCT medical school myself, I owe Professor Noakes an inordinate debt of gratitude for opening my eyes to an alternative explanation for obesity which I was not taught at medical school." Most people who criticise the Banting (LCHF) diet "don't know much about it and have not read any of the books" Noakes recommends, Arland said. She challenged all doctors to read *Why We Get Fat (And What To Do About It)* by Gary Taubes. "At worst, you'll understand some of the theory and evidence behind the (LCHF) diet even if you disagree with it. at best you may, like me, also reap benefits for yourself and/or your patients.

In the interim, many medical doctors have expressed shock at the full extent of the bullying and have apologised to Noakes in private for not supporting him.

Some have wondered why Noakes did not make the hearing going away simply by deregistering from the HPCSA as a medical doctor. After all, he had not practised clinical medicine for more than 15 years when the HPCSA charged him. The HPCSA would have had no jurisdiction over him. The HPCSA could have held a disciplinary hearing against him anyway and found him guilty. Given its behaviour throughout the hearing, and the many delaying tactics and changing of the goal posts in which it indulged, it's likely that the HPCSA would have gone that route.

But Noakes has said evading the charge was never an option. For the sake of his professional and personal integrity but also to ensure that no doctor would ever again have to face what he faced, he felt he had to face his accusers.

Still, many questions lie unanswered in just why the HPCSA so speedily took up cudgels against Noakes on Strydom's whim. And why all the universities involved have so resolutely refused to offer any apology.

There are signs that universities are slowly waking up to the dangers of academic bullying or mobbing.

Dr Fleur Howells, a senior lecturer in psychiatry at UCT, has reviewed the issue of and given a broader description of academic bullying. In a manuscript submitted for publication in 2017 (F Howells and L Ronnie, *Academic gullyng, Shadows across the Ivory Tower*), Howells writes that there are three forms of academic bullying. The third, "social bullying", also known as relational aggression, is "the deliberate or active exclusion or damage to the social standing of the victim through, for example, publicly undermining a junior academic's viewpoint".

She identifies four key components of bullying: intent to harm, experience of harm, exploitation of power and aggression. (The conduct of the academics against Noakes neatly fulfil all diagnostic criteria for bullying.)

Australian academic Dr Jacqui Hoepner has studied the use of bullying tactics to suppress or silence dissenting scientific opinions. In a discussion with Daryl Ilbury, author of *Tim Noakes: The Quiet Maverick*, Hoepner disclosed her original assumption: that most cases of academic suppression or silencing arise from outside academic circles. To her surprise, she discovered the opposite: "The bulk of suppression or silencing came from within academia, from colleagues and competitors," she told Ilbury. "This suggests that the assumed model of respect and disagreement between academics is inaccurate."

Hoepner was astonished to uncover 43 different "silencing behaviours" that fly in the face of the concept of academic freedom: "Every policy and university guideline I looked at suggested that academic freedom was absolutely central to what academics do and their place in society... [But] there's a real disconnect between what academics think they are guaranteed under academic freedom and what the reality is for the life of an academic."

She also discovered that the nature of these silencing attacks was "more of a personal gut response: that someone has crossed a boundary and we need to punish them. The exact motivation differed from case to case but it seemed very much a visceral response."

Typically as in the case of academic bullying of Noakes, attacks are ad hominem, with allegations such as "You're doing real harm," "You're causing confusion," and "you're undermining the public's faith in science."

Perhaps with direct relevance to Noakes experience, Hoepner said of academic bullying: "If a scientist discovers evidence that contradicts decades of public health messaging and says that data doesn't support the messaging, and that person is attacked, and publicly ... that's insane!"

Marika Sboros

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