At 8:40 on Saturday 13 October, 2007 the Society of Private Nurse Practitioners (SPNP) lost a dear friend, respected colleague and exemplary midwife with the death of Joy McPherson. In her life Joy had an amazing influence on the midwifery fraternity and the private nurse practitioners in the Cape. Joy died five months after being diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour.

Figure 1: Joy earlier in her career

Having emigrated from the United Kingdom in 1969, Joy worked as a midwife at Groote Schuur Hospital and Leeuwendal Nursing Home prior to entering private practice. The standards she set and her willingness to participate in the activities of the profession and the SPNP bear testimony to everything for which she stood. She was the driving force behind the Guidelines for Homebirths which were adopted by the SPNP in 2004.

Joy was able to navigate through the battle of wills which often resulted when clients who wanted what was best for their infants could not make sense of the conflicting arguments about immunisation, breast-feeding, homebirths, complementary practices and common sense. Joy was one of the first midwives to perform waterbirths for her moms who wished to have their infants in this way.

She remained at the forefront of the battle to ensure that midwives could continue to deliver babies in the safety of maternity units in private hospitals. This was often in the face of opposition from the nursing staff employed in those hospitals. The needs and safety of her clients remained paramount.

Joy served on the SNPN Executive Committee as member and as Branch Chairperson, only standing down at a time when she found that being available for her frail mother was her priority. We were thrilled when she returned to the Exco recently. She was diagnosed a couple of days after complaining of headaches and tiredness at an Exco meeting and characteristically Joy promptly set about putting everything into fighting this disease. On 21 May 2007 Joy underwent surgery, which was followed by radiation and chemotherapy. On a website she and her family recorded her thoughts as the disease progressed and it is evident that she retained her sense of joy and determination to the end.

www.urbansoil.co.za/savethejoy

Normally one would find the prettiest photo of the person whom one is remembering, but in this instance it has not been difficult to select the more appropriate photo of Joy smiling as she was leaving the hospital after collecting her first batch of chemotherapy.

In her web blog she says:

“Tuesday morning was the beginning of chemo. Instead of just giving me some pills, they handed us the entire dispensary to take home! (See the picture of me outside the Oncology Dept Figure 2.) So much has happened since then and we have been backwards and forwards to Constantiaberg hospital daily for radium therapy which doesn’t hurt, but makes me feel (and look) a lot like Hannibal Lector. Having to be strapped in so that I can’t move my head at all. With the mask they have fitted me with, I must look pretty scary. The first day was a big learning curve for us as we were told to experiment and see what the best time of the day suited me to take the chemo capsules. I took them early on day two (Wednesday) ….. big mistake! I thought was done for but hey, I’m still here!”

Figure 2: Joy during her first oncology visit. “They handed us the whole dispensary.”

At the beginning of September 2007 a benefit concert was held for Joy at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town. It is hardly surprising that a comedy show was selected for the event. It sold out through word of mouth ticket sales. The venue was filled with family, friends, colleagues and many clients. It was to be the last time Joy was with us in public.

During one of our last conversations with Joy, she said not to take her off the Christmas card list. Joy did not make it to Christmas, but she certainly was in our thoughts and on our list.

She is survived by her husband Neil and children Trevor and Emma.