

# Mandela book raises ethics questions

The South African Medical Association (Sama) has condemned a book on former state president Nelson Mandela's last days, saying the author violated the most fundamental principle of patient/doctor relationships.



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The book - *Mandela's Last Years* - was written by former SANDF surgeon-general Dr Vejay Ramlakan, who was part of the medical team treating Mandela in the months before his death.

"Irrespective of the contents of the book, all doctors are reminded of their ethical responsibilities to patients, regardless of who they are. The core ethical tenet of the doctor/patient relationship is the principle of confidentiality.

"In the now defunct Hippocratic Oath, it refers to secrets in the doctor/patient relationship as being 'holy'. Perhaps of greater relevance the Geneva Declaration, used by most doctors in their oath taking, contains the line: 'I will respect the secrets that are confided in me, even after the patient has died'," says Dr Mzukisi Grootboom, chairperson of Sama.

The book reveals several undignified episodes at the end of Mandela's life as well as bitter family squabbles over his care and legacy.

"I condemn the book in the strongest terms," Mandela's widow, Graca Machel said in a statement released by her charity foundation. She also threatened legal action against Ramlakan and the publisher, Penguin Random House, which has

subsequently pulled the book from circulation.

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