IN MEMORIAM

In memoriam Professor Paul Vermeire, 1936–2007: a tribute from the *ERJ* Chief Editors

M. Decramer^{*,f}, E. Berglund^{#,f}, U. Costabel^{†,f}, P.J. Sterk^{+,**} and K.F. Rabe^{§,***}

It is our sad duty to announce the passing of Professor Paul Vermeire to the readers of the *European Respiratory Journal* (*ERJ*). Paul Vermeire passed away on August 8, 2007 at the age of 71 years, after a long and courageous battle against cancer. His passing is an immense loss to the *ERJ* and the European Respiratory Society (ERS), of which he was one of the founding fathers.

Born in 1936, Paul studied medicine at the University of Ghent (Ghent, Belgium), where he graduated in 1960. He then specialised in internal medicine. From 1963–1964 he resided as a postdoctoral research fellow at the Cardiovascular Research Institute (CVRI) in San Francisco (CA, USA), where his training as an academic medical conceptual thinker was completed. He became a true academic. His stay at the CVRI profoundly influenced his future career and left a lasting mark on his academic development. He met his wife, Nicole Duclos, at CVRI and they were married in San Francisco in the house of Dr Jay Nadel, who remained his mentor and friend for the rest of his life. In 1967, he returned to the University of Ghent where he became the Chief of Intensive Care and Coordinator of the Emergency Dept. In 1976, he moved to the University of Antwerp (Antwerp, Belgium) where he became Chief of the Respiratory Division and the first Professor of Pneumology in 1979, then later Chief of Medicine. He remained Chief of the Respiratory Division at this University until his retirement in 2001. Paul was responsible for the training of countless Belgian pneumologists. His trainees admired him for his wide and profound knowledge of pneumology but also for his warm-hearted approach and genuine concern for his patients.

Paul had a truly stellar career. He was a hard worker and showed great devotion to both his patients and his work. He became one of the best international experts in the field of epidemiology of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and in that capacity he took part in the large European surveys on those diseases. Together with Prof.

Nicolaos Siafakas, he was also responsible for the first ERS COPD Guidelines, which were published in the *ERJ* in 1995 [1].

Paul probably impressed people most with his charming, affable and friendly personality, and turned many people in Belgium, Europe and across the world into real friends. He once confided to us that his greatest asset in life proved to be his smile! He was an excellent diplomat and often easily solved problems that were insolvable to others before him. This capacity was also of great value in his work for both national and international societies, where throughout his career he was able to unite and to build.

At national level he was President of the Belgian Society of Pneumology from 1987 to 1988 and President of the Flemish and Belgian Tuberculosis Network from 1991 to 2005. In the latter capacity, Paul was able to maintain government funding for this association during very difficult monetary times. He also introduced smoking cessation to the organisation and was able to construct an effective network in this area. He was one of the first to recognise the real significance of smoking cessation and its potential impact on public health. Paul was honoured for his achievements by the Belgian Society of Pneumology at its annual meeting in Spa (Belgium) in 2001.

Paul probably contributed most to the field of respiratory medicine through his international career. Perhaps not by coincidence, he was one of the leaders at the crossroads of the history of both the ERS and the *ERJ*, and his natural feeling for

*Respiratory Division, University Hospital, University of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium.
#Engelbrektsgratan 12, Gothenburg, Sweden. †Pneumology/Allergology, Ruhrlandklinik, Essen, Germany. +Dept of Pulmonology, Academic Medical Centre, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam,
§Dept of Pulmonology, Leiden University Medical Centre, Leiden, The Netherlands. ^fFormer
European Respiratory Journal Chief Editor. ^{**}Present *European Respiratory Journal* Chief Editor.

STATEMENT OF INTEREST: None declared.

CORRESPONDENCE: M. Decramer, Respiratory Division, University Hospital, University of Leuven, Herestraat 49, 3000 Leuven, Belgium. Fax: 32 16346803. E-mail: marc.decramer@uz.kuleuven.ac.be

diplomacy was responsible for the fact that he was one of the founding fathers of both. Paul was Secretary General of the European Society for Clinical Physiology (SEPCR), and contributed in that capacity to the negotiations with the European Pneumological Society (SEP) concerning the merger that formed the present ERS, in 1990. Paul also organised the very successful SEPCR meeting in Antwerp in 1987 on "Mechanisms and management of respiratory symptoms", a theme that is still very relevant now.

His role in the history of the *ERJ* was probably even greater and the European respiratory community is forever indebted to him because of his contribution to the *ERJ*. During the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease congress in Brussels in 1978, organised by the late Prof. Andries Gyselen, Paul chaired an Editors meeting at which there were representatives from a number of European respiratory journals. This resulted in the merger between *Acta Tuberculosea et Pneumologica Belgica*, of which Paul was the Editor, and the *Scandinavian Journal of Respiratory Disease*, of which Prof. Erik Berglund was the Editor. The new journal became the *European Journal of Respiratory Diseases*. A second merger between this latter journal and the *Bulletin Européen de Physiopathologie Respiratoire*, the journal of SEPCR, of which Prof. Jean-Claude Yernault was Chief Editor, finally led to the creation of the *ERJ* [2]. Dr Peter Howard and Dr Philip Quanjer also played an important role in this historical event. Paul was first Associate Editor and later Chief Editor, from 1990–1995. From the beginning he chose the path of a true academic journal for the *ERJ*, which paved the way for its present position. Even after his period as Chief Editor he remained very important to the later Chief Editors, Prof. Ulrich Costabel and Prof. Marc Decramer, with his excellent advice and his superb editing skills. We often thought that in terms of editing manuscripts he surpassed us all. That is why he remained active in various capacities of the *ERJ* for a long period thereafter until 2003.

Paul's communication skills were highly important in his capacity as Chief Editor. In an editorial of the *ERJ* [3], it was explicitly mentioned that "Paul Vermeire is to be admired for his ability to communicate with unhappy authors, who complain about unfair rejection of what they think is important

work". Together with Prof. Jean-Claude Yernault [4] and Prof. Romain Pauwels [5], who both passed away in recent years, he was a worthy ambassador for Belgium on the international scene. Paul was a pleasant and modest person who would never put himself at the forefront. This is why we were all delighted that in 2006 at the ERS Congress in Munich, he received the Congress Chairman Award for his contributions to the ERS and *ERJ*; it was an award he richly deserved.

Life did not always treat Paul gently. His father died when he was 22 years of age and this gave him, at a very young age, the responsibility of his mother, his younger brother and sister. He took on this heavy task with a great sense of responsibility, as he did with many others later on in life, in a spirit of putting the interest of others before his own. He later also cared for his mother when she became ill. His beloved wife Nicole Duclos died much too young, leaving him alone with his son Luc and his daughter Marie-Agnès. He took great pleasure in spending time with his grandchildren, which became a new mission in his life. In the autumn of his years he was comforted by his new partner Dr Magda Uydebrouck. On behalf of the *ERJ* and the whole European respiratory community we respectfully offer our sincere condolences to Paul's family for the passing of this charming and remarkable man.

As was printed on his obituary card, Paul conquered the heart of so many people who will never forget him: "I buried your name in my heart, where nobody ever can efface it..."

REFERENCES

- 1 Siafakas NM, Vermeire P, Pride NB, *et al.* Optimal assessment and management of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). The European Respiratory Society Task Force. *Eur Respir J* 1995; 8: 1398–1420.
- 2 Berglund E, Yernault JC. The new European Respiratory Journal. *Eur Respir J* 1988; 1: 1.
- 3 Costabel U. On the continued growth of the *ERJ*. *Eur Respir J* 1996; 9: 1–2.
- 4 Vermeire P, De Vuyst P. In memoriam Jean-Claude Yernault, 1943–2004. *Eur Respir J* 2005; 25: 1–2.
- 5 Bousquet J, Fabbri L, O'Byrne P, Van Cauwenberghe P. In memoriam Romain Pauwels. *Eur Respir J* 2005; 25: 585–589.