



IN MEMORIAM

In memoriam Jean-Claude Yernault, 1943–2004

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It is our sad duty to announce to the readers of the *European Respiratory Journal* (ERJ) the recent passing, on September 21, 2004, after a prolonged illness, of Professor Jean-Claude Yernault, who was the first Chief Editor of the Journal and, for many years, a prominent personality within both Belgian and European respiratory medicine.

Born in 1943, Jean-Claude began his studies in medicine in 1959 at the Free University of Brussels, where he graduated as an MD in 1966 at the age of only 23. He obtained his PhD degree at the same university in 1978 with a thesis entitled: "Contribution to the study of the effects of pulmonary circulation on the mechanical properties of the lung in man". Jean-Claude trained in respiratory medicine at the city hospital of Mons and with Professor Armand De Coster at the Saint-Pierre University Hospital in Brussels, becoming a certified specialist in respiratory medicine in 1971. When the Free University of Brussels opened its new Erasme University Hospital in 1977, he was appointed Head of the Dept of Respiratory Medicine; he left this position in 1993 to become Medical Director of the Erasme Hospital. In 1987, he was also appointed Professor of Respiratory Medicine at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). He was a promoter or member of the jury for 13 doctoral theses in his own university and served as member of the jury for many doctoral theses at other Belgian and European universities.

On the national scene, between 1983 and 1990, he was successively Secretary, Vice-President and President of the Belgian Society for Pneumology, and he also served as President for the Contact Group of Respiratory Physio-Pathology. In these functions, he always promoted the presentation and discussion of good clinical medicine. Therefore, last year, the society decided to create a yearly "Prize Jean-Claude Yernault" to be awarded at its main annual December meeting for the best presentation of a clinical case report.

Internationally, Jean-Claude carried out an impressive number of important functions. For many years, he was a member of the Working Group on "Standardisation of lung function tests", meeting in Luxembourg for the European Community,

and he became president of this group in 1993. Between 1984 and 1989, he was Board Member of the Société de Pneumologie de Langue Française, becoming President of this Society during 1988–89 and its first non-French member appointed to that position.

He had been a prominent member of the two founding societies of the ERS, the Societas Europea Pneumologiae (SEP) and the Societas Europae Physiologiae Clinicae Respiratoriae (SEPCR), when he was asked to organise the first congress of



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the ERS in Brussels in 1991. The “provisional” logo of the ERS, which he helped to design for this first congress, finally became the definitive one and it thus appropriately features on top of this “In memoriam”! He served after Stewart Clarke as the second President of the unified society between 1991 and 1992. Being fully conscious of the important role this new society had to play in promoting and improving European respiratory medicine, he initiated the European School of Respiratory Medicine and was its first president, inaugurating the considerable achievements of this organisation in spreading the teaching of our speciality throughout western and eastern Europe. He consciously and persistently directed most of these efforts towards the eastern European countries. He was honoured by the ERS for this work, by receiving the Presidential Award from Professor Robert Loddenkemper at the Society’s meeting in Madrid in 1999.

The *ERJ* also owes a great debt to Jean-Claude. When it was born in 1988 from the merger of the *European Journal of Respiratory Diseases* and the *Bulletin Européen de Physiopathologie Respiratoire*, he had been on the board of the latter journal since 1976 and Chief Editor since 1984, taking over from the eminent founder of the journal, Professor Paul Sadoul of Nancy. The *Bulletin* was more devoted to science than to clinical medicine, and its board was, at first, rather reluctant to merge with a clinical respiratory journal. With his kind and effective diplomacy, he relieved all apprehensions of the Management and Editorial Board members of both journals and started working as a joint Chief Editor with Erik Berglund for two years. With his wife Béatrice, he effectively set up the organisation of the intake and reviewing process of new manuscripts, whereas Erik was responsible for final acceptance of papers: an unusual but very effective way of ensuring the start of a fusion journal in the best of harmonies! After two years, Jean-Claude estimated that he had achieved his goals, leaving it to others, in this case, one of us (P. Vermeire), to carry on the job, thanks to the efficient manuscript-handling system he had designed and started [1, 2]! He himself had immediately taken on other editorial challenges, initially for two years as Chief Editor of the *European Respiratory Review* and later, in 1994, for three years, the *European Respiratory Topic*, journals aimed at disseminating practical information to the clinical pulmonologist.

Jean-Claude was, and always remained, an astute and caring clinician, who never neglected the interests of his patients. He had a keen interest for careful clinical semiology, more specifically for the study of breathing sounds, and was able to transmit his knowledge and enthusiasm to his co-workers

and students. One of his publications on the symptomatology and semiology of respiratory diseases clearly demonstrates his clinical experience and talents [3]. He also actively participated in many large clinical trials, especially those related to the treatments of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Jean-Claude was a talented and persistent initiator in many areas, and not just in the social life of societies and journals. In his own department, his remarkable intelligence and clarity of vision of unsolved clinical and scientific problems, in which he was a real “auto-didact”, allowed him to stimulate his co-workers to start research in many different areas. He fully assisted and closely followed them at the start of their efforts, but, once things were going well, he let his “spiritual sons” go freely, turning his full attention to new challenges. This allowed him to develop one of the strongest pneumological departments in Belgium.

Despite his achievements, Jean-Claude always remained a friendly and modest man, discrete about himself and his family. With his intimates, he was very social, liked to laugh and have fun, and appreciated good wines and foods: an “epicurist! With others, he often appeared rather introvert. He hated conflict and always tried to find peaceful solutions; like many Belgians, he had developed special talents in this! He also had a particular interest in historical medical publications, especially those on semiology, asthma and COPD.

Hopefully, this brief presentation of his achievements effectively documents a number of personal characteristics of Jean-Claude that will be greatly missed by those who have known him well and even more by those who have been his close collaborators for many years. Jean-Claude is survived by his dear spouse Béatrice, with whom he had a very close relationship, his son Dimitri and his spouse, as well as two grandchildren. Through us, we would like the *European Respiratory Journal* to present to them its sincere condolences for the passing of this fine and remarkable man.

REFERENCES

- 1 Berglund E, Yernault JC. The new *European Respiratory Journal*. *Eur Respir J* 1988; 1: 1.
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- 3 Yernault JC. Symptomatology et sémiologie des maladies respiratoires. *Encyclopédie Médico-Chirurgicale* 2002, 6-000-C50, 14p.