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Clinica Chimica Acta

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/cca

Obituary

Prof. René Dybkaer: A man of vision and great intellect



IFCC has lost its second President in just a matter of days. Prof René Dybkaer from Copenhagen, Denmark passed away on 29th April 2019 at the age of 93y. Prof Dybkaer was IFCC President from 1979 until 1984 having been Vice President from 1973.

Prof Dybkaer was a medical graduate from the University of Copenhagen who chose to specialize in laboratory medicine, both medical microbiology and clinical chemistry. He held several appointments at hospitals in Copenhagen, including head of the Department of Clinical Chemistry at Frederiksberg Hospital from 1977 until 1996. From 1997, at the age of 70y, he became head of a department dedicated to laboratory standardization at the Kommunehospitalet in Copenhagen and that gives us an insight to his greatest contribution to our profession.

More than 50 years ago Prof Dybkaer appreciated the need for international collaboration to achieve harmonization in laboratory medicine in the interests of patient safety. In particular, he noted inconsistency and confusion in the way that laboratory test results were reported to doctors. This led him in 1960, together with Kjeld Jørgensen, to establish the basis for a logical system of terminology for laboratory tests and their results. Since then his formative system of terminology has been adopted internationally, under the auspices of the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC). Prof Dybkaer was the primary author of the 'IUPAC Silver Book' entitled 'A Compendium of Terminology and Nomenclature of Properties in Clinical Laboratory Sciences'. This definitive work was revised, updated

and republished in 2017.

Prof Dybkaer's interest in terminology extended into wider areas of metrology, the science of measurement, which he applied to several aspects of laboratory medicine. He became established as the leading international expert and worked with many global organizations including IUPAC, the International Standards Organization (ISO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM). He was a skilful committee member and chair applying logic and good humour to achieve consensus from deep discussions on difficult topics.

In 2004 Prof Dybkaer became a Doctor of Science in Medicine at the University of Copenhagen, submitting a thesis entitled 'An Ontology on Property for Physical, Chemical and Biological Systems'. Such is the repute of this work that it merits its own pages in the IUPAC website. <https://ontology.iupac.org>

As Vice President and President Prof Dybkaer helped to introduce metrology to IFCC and this endures through the Scientific Division Committee for Nomenclature, Properties and Units (C-NPU) and the active involvement of IFCC as a founding member of the Joint Committee for Traceability in Laboratory Medicine (JCTLM). He led the introduction of Corporate Members into IFCC and hosted the first IFCC General Conference in Copenhagen. He also applied his clarity of thinking and organizational skills to prepare the IFCC Articles and to introduce congress guidelines and IFCC archives.

Prof Dybkaer received numerous international awards for his groundbreaking work, including the IFCC Henry Wishinsky Distinguished International Service Award in 1993. He received these awards with characteristic modesty and grace.

Away from laboratory medicine Prof Dybkaer was a talented jazz clarinetist and a meticulous collector and archivist of postage stamps. He has the honour of being IFCC's first, and perhaps only, Olympian representing Denmark in fencing at the 1948 and 1952 Olympic Games.

With the death of Prof Dybkaer the world of laboratory medicine has lost a true visionary and a man of great intellect. His legacy can be seen every day in the millions of laboratory test results that are reported according to the convention that he introduced.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cca.2019.05.030>

Available online 21 June 2019
0009-8981