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Obituary

Professor Henri Tagnon



Professor Henri Tagnon died peacefully in Brussels on 2 December 2000 at the age of 89. He will be remembered as a brilliant scientist, a tireless, diligent and cultured man. He was a medical pioneer and his vision changed the field of European oncology.

Professor Tagnon obtained his medical degree at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) in 1936. After 4 years of training in internal medicine, he left for USA where he spent 6 years at the Harvard Medical School in Boston and 7 years at Cornell University and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. In 1953, Professor Tagnon returned to Brussels to the Institut Jules Bordet, a hospital then dedicated to surgery and radiotherapy. Upon his return, he created the first medical service with the ultimate goal of establishing a comprehensive cancer center.

In 1962, Professor Tagnon convinced some European colleagues and friends to work together in order to collaborate on a voluntary basis in the fight against cancer and to create a network, the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC). The EORTC is recognised as introducing Europe to a multidisciplinary approach to cancer research and management. For the first time, European research to establish state-of-the-art-treatments was co-ordinated at an international level.

He succeeded in convincing doctors to work with statisticians in designing clinical research protocols and introducing the concept of randomised trials to Europe. He was not only a great advocate of controlled clinical studies to improve cancer treatment but also believed in

close co-operation between the different disciplines and thereby introduced multidisciplinary in Europe.

Professor Tagnon kept contact with his colleagues and friends in USA. He led the way to establish a close and successful cooperation between the EORTC and the US National Cancer Institute. This led, in 1972, to the creation of an NCI Liaison Office in Brussels in space adjacent to the EORTC.

Between 1962 and 1974, data of EORTC studies were registered and handled in a different localisation. In 1974, Professor Tagnon created the EORTC Data Center in Brussels to provide the necessary infrastructure and analytic statistical support to the different research activities conducted within the framework of the EORTC. The Data Center received early support from the US NCI.

He was very attached to the EORTC Data Center, which grew from its early beginnings to a complex research facility with a dedicated staff of 120 individuals. He assisted in and was delighted to share in the growth of EORTC and to see its recent achievements. He served as the EORTC President from 1975 to 1978.

Beyond his medical vision, Professor Tagnon was practical and convinced decision-makers and fundraisers to provide the necessary financial support to fund the EORTC. In 1986, he created the EORTC Foundation to provide core support to the EORTC.

Today, the EORTC is a “success story”, as Professor Tagnon liked to say. It now has a unique network of more than 2000 doctors who work together to discover better treatments to help all patients with cancer and his

vision of the multidisciplinary approach is now accepted as optimal management for patients with cancer.

Professor Tagnon trained and influenced generations of medical doctors, he taught them to become ambitious in their goals and encouraged them to pursue their training and research in the USA. He continued, upon his return to Europe, to help young doctors seek the means to achieve their goals and to face up to the challenge to find new treatments to cure cancer. He himself had solved many problems and led new efforts and he taught others the gratification, so rare, of being able to change things.

Professor Tagnon created also the *European Journal of Cancer* and was editor of the Journal from 1965 to 1989.

In 2000, Professor and Mrs Tagnon celebrated 60 years of marriage, years in which Mrs Tagnon supported all his professional initiatives in an unflinching way.

Professor Tagnon was an idealist with unceasing enthusiasm and energy. Professor Tagnon left all his collaborators a scientific and cultural inheritance. His approach to life, his vision of the scientific world and, in particular, of the EORTC, were and remain sources of inspiration. With such a precious legacy, we must continue to lead the way with all the energy and all the hope that this real humanist gave to us.

Françoise Meunier, Director General, EORTC,
Allan van Oosterom, President, EORTC