In honour and in memoriam Jean Berger

« In Memoriam » Jean BERGER 1930-2011

Jean Berger was born in Valdoie (Territoire de Belfort). He was a medical student in Paris and a resident in the Department of Nephrology, directed by Pr Jean Hamburger. Jean Hamburger himself advised him to choose renal pathology. The title of his thesis was: Contributions of renal biopsy in the anatomo-clinical knowledge of renal diseases. That was in 1960!

In 1970, he was promoted to Professor of Pathology in the Paul Brousse Hospital- Villejuif (University of Paris)-France. In 1979, he became Director of the Pathology Department in Laennec Hospital Paris V University, where he worked every morning. At the same time, he worked at the Necker Hospital, both with Halina Yaneva in the Pathology Laboratory of gynecology-endocrinology and in the renal unit of the Nephrology Department with Hyacinthe de Montera, Nicole Hinglais and Bernadette Nabarra and later with Laure-Hélène Noël and Dominique Droz.

It is important to recall some dates in the story of renal pathology. In 1954, knowledge about renal lesions depended mostly on autopsy. Since 1957, in the Necker Hospital, renal biopsies were performed regularly, first by open surgery and later, in 1970, by transcutaneous needle biopsy. Electron microscopy was employed at the end of the fifties and at the beginning of the sixties immunofluorescence studies began to be developed with staining for Ig and complement factor.

The role of Jean Berger was central in the discovery of IgA Nephropathy. First he described, together with Pierre Galle, the presence of mesangial deposits by electron microscopy


and « Dense Deposits » within lamina densa


Jean Berger had learnt immunopathology in London in Deborah Doniach’s laboratory. In the following years, together with Nicole Hinglais, application of immunofluorescence allowed him to discover IgA Nephropathy, which was called « Berger’s disease » in France

• Berger J, Hinglais N. Les dépôts intercapillaires IgA-IgG. J Urol Nephrol 1968 ;74 :694-695,

• Levy M, Beaufils H, Gubler MC, Habib R. Idiopathic recurrent macroscopic hematuria IgA-IgG deposits in children (Berger’s disease). Clin Nephrol 1972 ;163-169). At this time, Liliane Morel-Maroger (later Liliane Striker), a young french pathologist, was a collaborator and she described the atmosphere of the laboratory at the beginning of immunopathology


Increasingly, the disease was officially recognized and papers concerning this entity were published in Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, United States, Australia, Japan, etc..

After this discovery, Jean Berger did not make many further significant contributions. However, he was one of the first to discover that IgA nephropathy can recur in renal transplantation

• Berger J, Yaneva H, Nabarra B, Barbanel C. Recurrence of mesangial deposition of IgA after renal transplantation. Kidney Int 1975 ;7 :232-241. He also contributed to the understanding of these IgA deposits


Jean Berger was a complex, original and unusual man. Outside renal pathology, he was passionately fond of music, painting and travel. He was invited to numerous meetings and with, his French accent, he was very popular because of his humour and his scepticism.

Laure-Hélène Noël