Appreciation

In memoriam Claude Amiel

Claude Amiel was born on December 15, 1930, and died on August 7, 1996, in Paris. He was Professor at Xavier Bichat Medical School and head of the Department of Medical Physiology at the Bichat Hospital in Paris. His career as a physician, teacher and researcher was full and accomplished. He was called upon to play a major role in organizing research in France; he was also a key man in the international nephrology community. To all his activities he applied the most exacting standards and an absolute dedication to perfection. A former fellow of Gabriel Richet, he was an outstanding physician and a major contributor to therapeutic advances both in acute renal failure and in acute care medicine. His remarkable scientific work began under François Morel and continued in Gabriel Richet’s laboratories in Paris. From 1979 he headed his own research group which became an INSERM unit (U251: Physiology of the Renal Tubule) in 1982. He was director of this Unit until 1994. He published 108 original articles mainly devoted to epithelial transports in the renal tubule, the inner ear, and the pulmonary alveoli. The application of similar concepts and methods to the study of epithelial transports in different organ systems reflected a highly original approach which proved remarkably fruitful. As a result, he and his colleagues identified several transport systems and characterized many membrane-associated and hormonal factors that influence epithelial transports. Interestingly, Claude Amiel was always able to bridge the gap between basic science and clinical medicine. Not only was he a remarkable physician and researcher, he was also a prominent teacher. Besides his clear and concise lectures, he contributed numerous reviews and chapters. He also showed a special gift for organizing academic teaching. These widely recognized abilities led to his appointment as an adviser for higher education at the Ministry of Education from 1981 to 1983; since 1985 he was also responsible for the Masters in renal physiology and pathophysiology in France. His versatile talents led him to play a crucial role in organizing research. He had numerous responsibilities in the University, the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and the Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale (INSERM), where he was Chairman of the Scientific Council between 1991 and 1995. Between 1989 and 1991, he headed the Department of Biology, Medicine and Public Health, a structure that he had created, at the Ministry of Research and Technology. Finally, he was Chairman of the Scientific Council of the French Foundation for Medical Research from 1988 to 1990. His remarkable qualities were recognized well beyond the frontiers of his country; Associate Editor of Kidney International since 1970, he became successively General Secretary and Vice-President of the International Society of Nephrology, and would have become its President, had he not been struck by a fatal illness. His work over the past thirty years has left an unmistakable mark not only on nephrology, but also on academic teaching and research in general.

His outstanding reputation resulted from his exceptional qualities as a human being. He could ask much of others because he was exacting with himself; strict indeed, but tolerant. Rigorous and accurate, he never left anything to chance. He could rapidly dominate the most varied subjects, his broad understanding reflecting a remarkable mind. Despite his heavy workload, Claude Amiel was always available and ready to offer judicious advice to those who needed his help. Some may have thought him stern but, beneath this exterior was a sharp sense of humour. Despite his strict demeanour he was a remarkably kind individual. He was totally loyal to his friends. His enthusiasms were diverse: his family, freedom, the Formula One, Victor Hugo ... Claude Amiel lived his last months as he lived his whole life, courageous, stoic, clear-minded but also full of tenderness. The gaze of this man who accomplished so much will dwell with those who were lucky enough to know him. May their deep admiration and sadness be conveyed to his wife and his three children.

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