‘Bon anniversaire’ for Marcel Legrain

Professor Marcel Legrain MD celebrates his 75th birthday in October this year. He was born in Paris in 1923, the son of a dermatologist who died prematurely when he was a child. Marcel Legrain completed his medical studies in Paris shortly after the end of World War II. Thereafter he built up at the Hôpital Dieu de Paris one of the very first facilities created in France for the treatment of acute renal failure, introducing the artificial kidney and peritoneal dialysis, novel methods which were quite revolutionary in the late forties. His pioneering experience in this field was the topic of his medical thesis entitled: ‘Néphrites aiguës et anuriques’, which he defended in 1951. He subsequently spent 2 years at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston under the guidance of Professor John P. Merrill, an experience which turned out to be most important for his future medical and scientific career.

Upon his return to Paris he worked at the Department of Metabolic and Diabetic Diseases (headed by Professor M. Dérôe) at the Hôpital Dieu. Subsequently he became, in 1965, Head of the newly created Department of Nephrology at the Hôpital Foch in Suresnes. Moving again in 1972, he built up the Department of Nephrology at La Pitié Hospital in Paris, which he headed until his retirement in 1986. Administrative retirement has, however, by no means meant idleness for Marcel Legrain, who has remained very active in many academic and administrative fields over the last decade.

Thanks to his multifaceted talents and hard-work Marcel Legrain has been instrumental in developing nephrology as a medical specialty on the national as well as international levels. Despite numerous academic and administrative commitments, however, he was a most dedicated and compassionate physician for his patients. Provision of excellent patient care was a top priority to him, which he fulfilled at all times.

As a teacher and mentor, he stimulated numerous young physicians in training to develop an interest for Nephrology. Many became nephrologists or maintained an interest in renal disease, attracted as they were by his teaching skills and communicative enthusiasm. Continuous update of knowledge for the Nephrological Community was also a primary goal that led him to organize the yearly ‘Séminaires d’Uro-Néphrologie–Pitié-Salpêtrière’, which he founded in 1975 and co-chaired with Professor René Küss for 12 years.

Marcel Legrain has always been actively involved in research, particularly as the Director of an INSERM Research Unit devoted to the study of renal disease. His scientific contributions include clinical and experimental studies dealing with physiological, pathophysiological, and therapeutic aspects of electrolyte disorders, acute and chronic renal failure, dialysis procedures (with a special focus on peritoneal dialysis), renal transplantation, which he pioneered in France with Professor R. Küss. He also pioneered in France epidemiological studies in renal diseases using computerized data-collection systems.

Marcel Legrain has also devoted considerable time, energy, and wisdom to serving the nephrological community in France and in Europe. He was one of the founding fathers of the Société de Néphrologie in 1960, a Society over which he presided in the years 1978–1980. He was Member of the EDTA Council in 1976, was elected President of the Association in 1978, and fulfilled this mandate till 1981. His very comprehensive knowledge of various areas of medicine along with a deep interest in economics and health-care administration led him to chair the Drug-Licencing Commission at the French Ministry of Health for
several years. Last but not least, his personal convictions and strong humanitarian motivations prompted him to promote medical education and establish nephrological facilities in developing countries, particularly in Algeria, a country for which he developed a very personal commitment; this led him to spend 2 years there after having stepped down from his position in Paris.

Beyond all these brilliant professional achievements, Marcel Legrain, The Man, is known to be a fascinating personality. This widespread opinion is fully shared by the undersigned, who has had the privilege of working alongside him for the past 40 years. A dedicated husband to his wife Colette, a father of four children who in turn enlarged the family with seven grandchildren, his faithfulness to his friends during the ups and downs of life, and his generosity and integrity make of Marcel Legrain 'Un homme de qualité' whom so many members of the International Nephrology Community feel fortunate and honoured to have known and appreciated during their lifetime!

With warm congratulations and 'ad multos annos'!

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