In Memoriam: Professor Jürg Reichen (1946–2017)

Professor Jürg Reichen passed away unexpectedly on 25 July 2017 at the age of 71, with an abruptness befitting his character. Professor Reichen was not someone to accept being diminished by any disease. He was a driving force and a major figure in hepatology over the last 30 years. He was born in January 1946 in the canton of Bern, Switzerland. He graduated from the University of Bern Medical School in 1971 and joined the Institute of Clinical Pharmacology, which was founded a few years before by his mentor Professor Rudolf Preisig. In 1976, he moved to the United States, where he was affiliated first with the National Institute of Health as a guest scientist, and later with Georgetown University as an intern and resident. He moved to Denver, Colorado, where he progressed to Associate Professor of Medicine within 5 years. In 1986, he returned to Switzerland and, in 1994, took over as Director of the Institute of Clinical Pharmacology, a position he held and shared with Professor Bernhard Lauterburg until 2011 when they both retired. He had a military career in parallel and was highly ranked in the Swiss army.

Professor Reichen was an original researcher, a specialist in the field of bile acids, portal hypertension and quantitative liver tests. He published more than 230 papers, some highly cited classical papers. He contributed to the understanding of bile formation and bile acid secretion, and during the 1970s, collaborated with Gustav Paumgartner, who was based in Bern at the time. He was always interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the pathophysiology of his favourite organ – the liver. One of my favourite publications of his is the 1988 Journal of Clinical Investigation paper that he wrote with his friend and pathologist Arthur Zimmermann, which describes, in an elegant series of experiments in cirrhotic rats, how sinusoidal capillarisation determines hepatic clearance.

His career was closely associated with the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL). He served the society as Secretary General from 1989 to 1991, and again as board member and educational councillor between 2003 and 2007. He also held the position of Associate Editor for the Journal of Hepatology from 1989 to 1993 and from 1998 to 2004. For his important contribution to the field of hepatology, he received an EASL lifetime merit award in 2008.

Professor Reichen had an extraordinarily broad knowledge of hepatology. He combined an astonishing cognizance of the literature, remembering articles unnoticed by others, with an intense clinical practice. His clinic was attended by patients who came from far afield for his advice. During his co-tenure with Professor Lauterburg, as Director of the Institute of Clinical Pharmacology, he maintained high standards, with international visibility. He took over this position from his predecessor, Professor Rudolf Preisig, who passed away a few months before him. Before retiring, Professor Reichen closed the Institute of Clinical Pharmacology, which had been the home of his career.

Professor Reichen was easily recognised by his big moustache, dark eyes and a cigarette burning in his hand. He was a man of strong opinion, providing clear-cut decisions without ambiguity and without compromise. He will be remembered by some in the community for his late emails, which some may have found disconcerting. A number of colleagues contacted me for advice on how to deal with these emails. We learned not to take them too seriously.

Professor Reichen was a renaissance man with interests in art, literature and music, especially contemporary music. He lived on the shores of Lake Murten, on which he loved to sail. An invitation to his home meant a memorable dinner, which he himself cooked and which was accompanied by exceptional wines. Professor Reichen was extremely proud of his family and is survived by his dear wife, Susi Reichen, and their three children – Hans-Jakob, Annemarie and Katharina – and several grandchildren.

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