Pierre Amalric, MD (1923-1999)

Pierre Amalric, MD, was born on June 24, 1923, in Velour sour Agouti, a small village in the south of France, situated 70 km from Toulouse, the capital of which is Albi. His father, Edmund, practiced general medicine, and his mother was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer in Gaillac, France. He survived by 3 children: Marie-Elizabeth, Carole (Mme Louis At), and Bertrand. His wife, Jacqueline, was killed following a tragic automobile accident on March 12, 1977.

During his adolescence, Pierre showed no interest in medicine as a career, much to the disappointment of his father. Rather, he was interested in pursuing the humanities, arts, and history. During the German occupation of France in 1940, he worked in his father’s clinic. He entered medical school in Toulouse in 1940 and received the diploma en medicine. He also joined a liberal arts college to obtain a degree in history. He soon entered a network of resistance to the German occupation under the direction of one of his professors.

From 1944 through 1945, he was assigned to various military units and hospitals. For a short time, he practiced general medicine. He soon came under the influence of Professor Calmettes, an ophthalmologist who became his role model and changed the direction of his career to ophthalmology. He was encouraged to open a clinic in Albi, which was really the beginning of his ophthalmologic career. Pierre made many trips throughout Europe visiting leading ophthalmologists, many of whom became lasting friends. Photography was one of his main interests, which served him well in furthering his medical career. His interest in rare books, history, and the humanities continued.

A fortuitous event occurred during the meeting of the Club Jules Gonin in Munich, Germany, in 1966. One of the subjects of this meeting was the use of fluorescent angiography in ophthalmology. I presented a paper on the use of fluorescein angiopathy in the treatment of diabetic retinopathy. At the end of the meeting, Pierre introduced himself and wanted to discuss some of the pictures he had taken on choroidal circulation. I told him that I was planning to have lunch with Professor Edward Norton, MD, but that he was welcome to join us. We met in the lobby of his hotel, and after 2 hours of discussing and looking at his magnificent pictures, we realized that we had missed lunch. Dr Norton recognized the high qualities of this innovative person. Their relationship continued and resulted in a close friendship that grew and extended to members of both families and led to the introduction of their mutual friends in both countries.

In 1969, Pierre invited a group of internationally known ophthalmologists interested in fluorescein angiography to meet in Albi. The conference was a tremendous success both scientifically and socially and led to the formation of the Fluorescein Angiography Society, which subsequently met in Japan, Germany, and Italy. People no longer asked “Où est Albi?” as its reputation was firmly established following this congress.

He published articles on ophthalmology, history, art, and humanities, numbering 670, including major articles and lectures, mainly in French. His main medical contributions were on choroidal circulation, the treatment of diabetic retinopathy, and a description of the Triangle Syndrome, which bears his name. The subject of his papers varied from the investigation of the mysterious disappearance of the ships of the explorer Lap enrouse, who was born in Albi, to the various eye problems of the French Revolutionary period.

He was proud of his French heritage and published a book on the history of French ophthalmology. He received many awards related to his efforts to preserve French culture. The distinguished national awards included Officier de la Legion d’Honneur, Chevalier de l’Ordre National du Merite, Croix de Guerre, Combat tant Volontaire de la Resistance, and Officier des Palmes Academiques. He was highly honored to be elected to the French Academy of Medicine. He also received 6 distinguished international awards and was especially proud of the honorary membership and Wacker Prize from the Club Jules Gonin. In addition, he was an honored guest of the American Academy of Ophthalmology.

Pierre possessed the high qualities of a truly great person and was regarded by many as a genius with a great sense of humor and wit. His capacity for work was demonstrated by his many lectures and publications. He enjoyed a full, productive life and appreciated the fantastic changes that had occurred on earth during his lifetime. He was devoted to his family and was a pillar of support at times of tribulation. He was noncomplaining during his long terminal illness, which ended in June 1999. We will miss him greatly but will retain many pleasant memories of happy times and good friendship.

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