

SOCIETY NEWS

Laudatio for Professor Raimund Margreiter on the occasion of the honorary membership of ESOT

doi:10.1111/tri.12209

Mr. President, Mr. Chairman, Mrs. Chairwoman, Dear Members and Guests, Dear Friends,

It is a great privilege for me to introduce to this audience a great leader of transplantation. Professor Raimund Margreiter was a founding member of ESOT and is today a newly elected honorary member of this learned society.

This introduction is moreover a very special one for myself, as Prof. Margreiter has been a spiritual mentor throughout my professional career. Indeed our professional lives, especially during my German and Swiss periods, frequently crossed each other at – for me – very important and decisive moments. One event I remember well was his comment when we were performing the first multi-organ procurement together in my hometown of Leuven after I had returned from Pittsburgh ... this was at a time when nephrologists still feared that this – at that time – revolutionary procedure would harm, or even destroy, the renal harvesting procedure.... I still hear today the words he pronounced in the midst of this surgery... ‘don’t worry, act as a responsible surgeon ... go on and you will make it’!

When the ESOT Ambassador committee nominated Raimund Margreiter before the Glasgow meeting as a future honorary member, no one realized then that this was really ‘the’ choice to make for this 2013 meeting.

Indeed, nobody in Austria, in Europe, nor in the world, could fit better with the overarching theme chosen for the Vienna ESOT congress namely, ‘Pushing the limits’. Professionally as well as extra professionally, indeed few people have pushed the ‘envelope’ as far as he has done!

Prof. Margreiter grew up in a picturesque Tirolean village located in the Zillertal – Fugen. Due to his particular talents and unceasing dynamism, he became known by virtually everyone in the region as the great ‘Mandi’. Later on he made his village and region famous, especially within the Eurotransplant community, and this was a long time before the region produced world-famous ski competitors such as Beni Raich and Herman Meyer. Fugen was the place where transplant professionals working within the Eurotransplant community were brought together for



25 years for the traditional winter meeting in order to discuss transplantation in a relaxed atmosphere....although all events had to start sharp at time!

Following the footsteps of his grandfather and great-grandfather, Prof. Margreiter graduated at the Faculty of Medicine of the Leopold Franzens University Innsbruck in 1965.

After a 3 years’ internship in Salzburg from 1965 to 1967, he did his surgical residency in the Department of Surgery of the University Hospital in Innsbruck between 1967 and 1972. He was awarded his PhD in 1980; the year after, he was appointed director of transplantation surgery. In 1999, he became director of the Department of General and Transplantation Surgery, and finally in 2008, director of the Department of Visceral, Transplant and Thoracic Surgery at Innsbruck University Hospital. He retired in 2009...and as he stated ‘it was a tough career but I made it’!

Pushing the limits professionally

His talents and his relentless desire for innovation allowed him to master all the techniques of abdominal as well as of thoracic and transplantation surgery.

Raimund is, to the best of my knowledge, the only surgeon worldwide who has successfully performed not only kidney, pancreas, pancreas islets, liver, intestine, and multivisceral but also heart, lung, and heart–lung transplants. He was also actively involved in the Innsbruck composite tissue and hand transplantation program. The transplant activity developed under his guidance during these three decades is really impressive!

His vast experience in all fields of transplantation allowed him also to take the landmark step of performing the world's first combined liver–kidney transplant in 1984 and to develop multi-organ transplantation in 1998. Over the years, he also developed a major interest in oncological surgery.

His visionary thoughts about transplantation and oncology were exemplified in a very aggressive approach toward metastatic liver disease. Combining vascularized organ and cellular transplantation together with heavy adjuvant cancer treatment was judged by many at that time to be foolish... I remind you that currently there is – because of major progresses in oncology, surgery, and transplantation – a great revival of interest to extend the indications for liver transplantation to metastatic, neuro-endocrine, and even colorectal liver disease! I am absolutely convinced, having a great interest myself in transplant oncology, that a few years from now, Raimund will be considered together with Tom Starzl and the late Rudolf Pichlmayr as one of the fathers of this field of medicine!

These major achievements were very elegantly recognized by the Eurotransplant Foundation when honoring him for the organization of the 20th ET-Winter meeting in Fügen. He was offered a pair of new skis having the brand name 'HEAD'...I suppose you got the message...the only part of the body he never transplanted was indeed the head minor tabs!

Prof. Margreiter was also a master organizer of scientific meetings and symposia. To mention just a few, the Transplantation Society international congress in 2004, the ESA meeting in 2010, the CTA transplantation symposium in 2007, and last but not least the seventh ESOT congress in Vienna in 1995 – and not so well-known – the impressive Ullman centennial meeting in 2002 in the Billroth House in Vienna. At this meeting, all but one – Prof. Barnard had passed away some months before – of the organ transplant pioneers eloquently explained how difficult the conquest of transplantation surgery and medicine had been during the last five decades.

Beside all his clinical duties, Raimund was also actively involved in many learned societies as well as organ allocation and sharing organizations. To cite a few, for many years, he was councilor and chairman of the annual meeting of Eurotransplant; president of the prestigious Euro-

pean Surgical Association and not forgetting ...exactly twenty years ago, between 1993 and 1995 he was president of ESOT!

He is member of twenty editorial boards including the most prestigious ones in general surgery as well as transplant surgery. He is a member of many learned societies, some of them – in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria – have recognized his outstanding contributions to the field by awarding him different honorary memberships. He was also a very productive scientist authoring or co-authoring not less than 707 papers!

All these activities had some common grounds ...a huge working capacity, perfectionism, pride, eagerness to help patients presenting with all different types of organ failure and...finally a good insight and critical overview of the situation!

So I think, we really may say ...he was never a burned-out but always a burned-in surgeon...a condition we all know is not so evident in this field of medicine!

Pushing the limits extra professionally

Beside his very challenging, difficult, and demanding professional activities, Prof. Margreiter also challenged the limits of physical and mental tolerance. This was exemplified by his track records at a young age as a bobber and ski champion...all activities that can sometime interfere with surgical activities, his multiple kayaking experiences at all four corners of the world culminating in the search for the origins of the some 1000-km-long Amazon River... [me, the canoe and the nature...!], and finally his multiple rock climbs ending with the Austrian Everest expedition – you all heard about here on Sunday evening.

Speed, equilibration, and endurance – you will recognize – are all characteristics one has to master in order to become an excellent surgeon. Probably all these exciting expeditions were the indicators of a brilliant surgical career and probably also a necessary condition to take on the heavy task of a transplant surgeon.

Dear Prof. Margreiter, dear Raimund, it was really an honor for me to deliver this ESOT laudatio on the occasion of your honorary membership of ESOT. Your contributions to the transplant community and especially to the European transplant community were really tremendous, reaching a level almost never reached before by one individual surgeon-scientist.

You have taught the next generations of surgeons that transplantation is 'the' modern form of general surgery! Hopefully – although I am a bit afraid of – this message will not be lost ...

Without any doubt, this important recognition by ESOT Council is given not only at the right moment and at the right place but most of all to the right person! Indeed – as

you stated yourself – you made it...and your hands were a very important part of it! *Herzliche Glückwünsche*...also to your charming wife Katarina, who must also have been a wonderful champion to accompany such a dynamic and visionary husband!

Jan Lerut
*Director UCL Transplant Center Brussels,
Belgium Chairman Ambassador Committee ESOT,
Past president ESOT, Vienna, Austria
e-mail: jan.lerut@uclouvain.be*