

SOCIETY NEWS

Laudatio to Professor Christian Cabrol honorary member of ESOT

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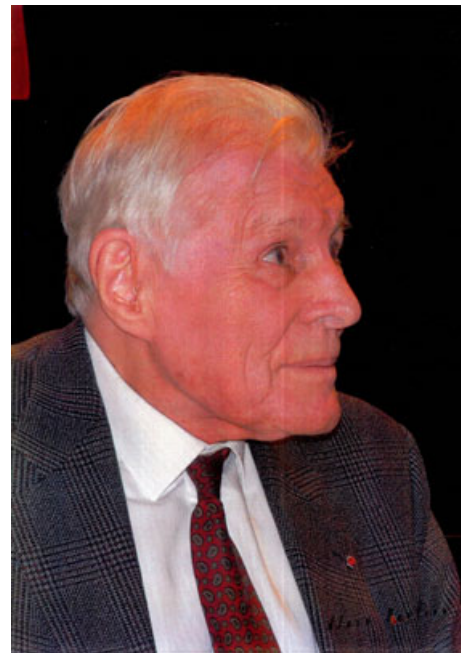
Prof Ch. Cabrol is one of the main pioneers of heart and heart–lung transplantation in Europe and is the first heart transplant surgeon to be nominated as Honorary Member of ESOT.

As a matter of fact, Prof Ch. Cabrol is a thoracic surgeon, but also brave-hearted himself for all this personal impact in organ recovery in France since more than 40 years and one joke runs about him in the T.V. podium, because he is so called ‘... Mr organ harvesting...’. Nevertheless, Ch. Cabrol was not born as we say in French ‘with a golden spoon in the mouth...!’ He is the hybrid of the 2nd generation between a grandfather who was M.D. and established in a family practice in the small city of Château-Thierry in the North of France and another grandfather winegrower in the vineyard of Champagne. The father of Ch. Cabrol knew how to mix talents of bee-keeper, winegrower and farmer.

For the small boy Ch. Cabrol, there was a choice between the grandfather’s jobs, and he preferred to embrace the career of a medical doctor than that of a farmer, as soon as the age of 5 y.o., thinking that it was easier to have a lancet in the hand rather than a plough.

As farmer’s son, he was sent to a boarding school in Lagny along the river La Marne, where he obtained his baccalaureate, the A grade level, and then, working hard, he succeeded in the difficult examination of entering in the Paris University Medical School. He wished very early to become a surgeon, and he had two parallel lives:

- one, a life of Anatomist during the night, dissecting hundreds of human cadavers, and he started a small work on lung anatomy under the auspice of his mentor, Prof Gaston Cordier, but the ‘small work’ became three books of anatomy of 2000 pages each where I sweated myself blood and tears 20 years later when I prepared the very difficult examination of the Residency in Hôpitaux de Paris, and at that time, I cursed the name of Cabrol.
- a second life during the day of thoracic surgeon in training when thoracic surgery came of age, under the authority in Paris of Prof J. Mathey, J.P. Binet, J.C. Rudler, Gaudart d’Allaine and Charles Dubost. Then, trying to improve his



knowledge and experience in heart surgery, Ch. Cabrol joined the Walton Lillehei’s team in Minneapolis in 1956 during one year, where he trained in experimental cardiac surgery in animals and where he met some surgeons who made also the history of thoracic transplantation, Norman Shumway and a young African named Christian Barnard. I have learned that N. Shumway was in fact a descendant of an old French Savoyard family and the French name of ‘chamois’, for this particular alpine goat, beared by his family, was anglicized from chamois to Shumway. During this training, Ch. Cabrol learned simplification of vessel anastomosis and heart conservation prior implantation developed by Shumway and Lower. When Ch. Cabrol came back to France, he built a new unit of cardiac surgery in the department of general surgery headed by Prof Mercadier in the hospital of La Pitié in Paris, and where, slowly but surely, he operated more and more hearts and lungs referred to

him by the major departments of cardiology and pneumology in Paris.

But Ch. Cabrol was so much disappointed to see many young patients dying of intractable dilatated cardiomyopathy with or without circulatory assistance that he decided to perform cardiac transplantation as soon as possible, when he felt ready with his team after a huge experimental work and under the mentorship of W. Lillehei.

He learned the result of the first xenogenic heart transplantation done by James Hardy in Jackson, USA, January 1964, the 1st allogeneic heart transplantation by Ch. Barnard in South Africa, December 1967, the first paediatric heart transplantation by Adrian Kantrowicz in Brooklyn, December 1967, the second heart transplant of Barnard, January 1968 and the first one of Shumway in Palo Alto, January 1968.

In Pitié-Salpêtrière, Ch. Cabrol and G. Guiraudon were ready and they did the 1st heart transplantation in Europe, the 7th in the world, on April 24, 1968, in the absence of the Head of the department of surgery who was abroad for a congress, a big mistake at that time.

Sadly enough, the recipient died 3 days after of pulmonary embolism and Ch. Cabrol, disappointed, had to announce this sad news to the press and also to get a bawling out of the Head of the department, Prof Mercadier and of the Director of 'Hôpitaux de Paris' because he had not asked permission of doing heart transplantation in emergency to his hierarchy.

There was a rough time for heart transplantation afterwards, but he personally performed more than 400 heart transplantations and thousands of heart operations.

Then after, Ch. Cabrol built a fantastic school of thoracic surgery in La Pitié Salpêtrière, with a small Iranian fellow, coming directly from Teheran and who became his successor and one of the best thoracic surgeons in the world, Iradj Gandjibakhch, and then Prof A. Pavie, and all together performed the 1st heart–lung transplantation in Europe on 1 March 1982.

Ch. Cabrol entered afterwards in a new life, becoming President of France-Transplant, the French network of transplantation after the retirement of Prof J. Dausset Nobel Prize winner and he had to ensure the transition between France-Transplant, an MD network, into a State Agency for Transplantation named Etablissement Français des Greffes and then Agence de Biomedecine.

During all that time, Ch. Cabrol militated in favour of the organ gift all over France, every day, every week, and he is ready even now to readily go in a small city, in a small meeting, and saying always the same sentence to the audience at the beginning: 'Hey, you! Have you a donor card in your pocket?'

Ch. Cabrol is surely a major contributory factor to the rate of organ donation in France, reaching 25 donors/million/year.

Thus, Ch. Cabrol is now retired but still active in organ donation campaign and is entered in the small and famous circle of the major pioneers of human organ transplantation as becoming ESOT honorary member-Paris 2009.

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