

OBITUARY

Professor Jules Traeger: a giant in Nephrology and Transplantation Medicine

Diego Cantarovich

ITUN (Institute of Transplantation-Urology-Nephrology), Nantes
University Hospital, Nantes, France
E-mail: diego.cantarovich@chu-nantes.fr

Professor Jules Ernest Charles Traeger passed away peacefully in Lyon, France, on May 25, 2016, at the age of 96. Over the course of his remarkable academic career in Lyon, Professor Traeger was not only a pioneer, but mostly a visionary, at the vanguard of Nephrology and Transplantation Medicine. Chief of Division and Professor at a very young age, he always succeeded in associating with professionals, like himself, ready to accomplish what seemed to be the impossible. In the 1960s, he recognized the vital importance of hemodialysis, not only in acute renal failure, but mostly for the chronic treatment of end-stage kidney disease. He therefore developed the concepts of dialysis centers and home dialysis, and the then utopian idea of administering it on a daily basis. The life of patients with chronic renal failure was thus transformed and a normal life “on dialysis” became possible.

He integrated kidney transplantation to “classic” nephrology, at times where it was considered an experimental procedure. The first kidney transplant was performed in Lyon in 1962, within the walls of the historic Antiquaille Hospital, located on top of the hills surrounding Lyon. The difficulty in obtaining organs at that time led him to perform in 1964 clinical xenotransplants, using kidneys retrieved from chimpanzees and transplanted “en bloc”, with surprisingly long survivals, even by today’s standards. But kidney transplantation was only a part of this new, revolutionary medicine. Diabetes was provoking enormous physical damage and was a major cause of chronic renal failure and death. Jules Traeger used to say that diabetes would soon become a major public health issue. He therefore participated to the idea of replacing the failing pancreas by a pancreatic graft. In the 1970s, Lyon and Minneapolis were the world



leading centers in this novel kind of “miracle transplant”. Obviously, such surgical feats were only made possible thanks to the technical skills of his younger urologist colleague, Jean-Michel Dubernard, and to the tight collaboration with the Division of Diabetology of San Raffaele Hospital in Milan, led by Guido Pozza.

But a transplant required a specific treatment aiming at preventing its rejection by the host organism. Under the influence of other pioneers, Thomas Starzl and Anthony Monaco in the USA and Michael Woodruff in Edinburgh, an “anti-lymphocytic serum” (ALS) was produced in Lyon in the record time of a few months. Lymphocytes obtained from the thoracic ducts of patients on the transplant waiting list and later fetal thymocytes were used to immunize horses and rabbits. This ALS was clinically used for the first time in 1966. Similar agents are still used today as the most widely used induction anti-rejection treatment worldwide.

But a true leader is mostly recognized by his ability to transmit his knowledge to the younger generations. Jules Traeger showed his ability to train with intellectual rigor a countless number of physicians coming from all over the world. His unit was truly cosmopolitan, open,

tolerant, and pragmatic. A truly great school of science and medicine was born under Professor Traeger's leadership. From 1968, an European Transplant course was established in Lyon, and from 1974 and for 25 consecutive years, the International Course in Transplantation and Clinical Immunology (CITIC) brought together every year in Lyon the world experts to debate on the advances and progresses of this new scientific field. The whole scope of what we now call "Translational Medicine" could be found within his Division, including basic research, with a small and large animal laboratory, interventional radiology, critical care medicine, operating rooms, laminar flow rooms, all integrated in a single building, the legendary Pavillon P at Hospital Edouard Herriot.

I first met Prof. Jules Traeger 40 years ago in Buenos Aires. His reputation, his charisma, and his wisdom brought me rapidly to his Division in 1980. We have since then become inseparable. I owe him everything.

When he retired in 1986, I moved to Nantes to go on with my career. But Jules Traeger always remained close to me and to my family, always attentive. Until his passing, he offered me his advice, support, and knowledge, in my professional as well as in my personal life. He was and will remain my adoptive father, and to my children a grandfather.

His passing away in the quietness of his house, facing the greenery of "Tête d'Or" Park, in the mild lyonnese spring, holding hands with his faithful wife since 63 years, was peaceful. Jules Traeger, tireless worker, passionate sailor, keen photographer, classical music connoisseur, and fabulous physician and scientist will always remain in our memories, our thoughts, and our deeds.

In the name of the whole nephrology and transplant community, I wish to express my gratefulness and my deepest and most sincere condolences to his adorable wife Yvonne Traeger.