

HOMENAGEM / Homage

Professor Ottar Sjaastad

Professor Ottar Sjaastad was made today by order of the King Harald V of Norway "ridder 1. klasse av Den Kongelige Norske St. Olavs Ordenen", i.e. a knight of the Order of St. Olav. This represents a moment of joy for many friends and pupils Professor Sjaastad has in our Country. Sjaastad has considerably influenced Brazilian Neurology, and we shall now express our deep gratitude and admiration.

Sjaastad is a well-known scientist of the present era. Having an exceptional talent for the medical field, being interested mostly in head and face pain, he created together with colleagues from all over the world the International Headache Society and started the journal *Cephalalgia*, the current leading publication in this field. Above all, with his contributions he changed the way physicians understand head pain.

As the medical science progresses, new entities are continuously described. Technology allows scientists to better understand the mechanisms of older diseases and re-classify them accordingly. The advances in genetics, perhaps the greatest revolution in modern medicine, has improved dramatically our view of some disorders and shown the existence of many others. James Parkinson wrote on Parkinson's disease simply by carefully observing patients with "shaking palsy". This would be much more difficult today. The time of identifying new maladies in medicine based on pure clinical observation is unfortunately almost over. The medical field has become so complex that new information usually comes through sophisticated investigation such as computer-aided imaging.

Professor Sjaastad, however, even in the age of computerised medicine, has described a number of new entities in his field, such as Chronic Paroxysmal Hemicrania, Hemicrania Continua, Cervicogenic Headache and SUNCT, just to mention some of them. He identified all these new diseases by carefully interviewing his patients, relatively few and selected individuals, understanding the intimate aggression to their bodies and souls, and dedicating his life to other people's sufferance. This represents the essence of

medicine, the ultimate objective of the Hippocratical profession, and proves that Parkinson's achievement is still possible.

Nevertheless, beyond his tremendous potential and observation skills for the clinical activity, Professor Ottar Sjaastad clearly understands that bench work is essential. He developed many laboratory projects to test his hypotheses as an attempt to understand the pathophysiology of the diseases he discovered. Among other studies, he investigated autonomic functions, intracranial circulation during headache attacks; he performed autopsy observations, biochemical, imaging, and epidemiological studies. All the scientific data produced by Professor Ottar Sjaastad are of high quality and extreme relevance.

No other human contact is more complex than the doctor-patient relationship. Extracting and interpreting information for a correct diagnosis requires a sublime combination of art and science. In medicine, unfortunately, art is combined to science in optimal proportions in relatively few doctors. Even fewer have also the extra talent for lecturing and teaching. Professor Sjaastad not just collects information from patients sufficient for precise diagnoses, but also identifies pieces of information that allow him to describe hitherto unknown syndromes. Qualities for teaching with clarity and precision, keeping the audiences constant attention, are obviously present in Professor Sjaastad. He has a particular talent as a lecturer as well as a scientist and clinician.

As a writer, Professor Sjaastad would never accept less than excellent manuscripts. His articles were checked in every detail, and no pupil was stimulated to send a piece of work to publication until a very last and completely correct version was available with his personal touch in every paragraph. Data are always carefully checked and re-calculated to be certain no mistake would be left behind. As the founding editor of *Cephalalgia*, during ten years Professor Sjaastad turned this publication into the most prestigious headache journal in the world. Sjaastad wrote the best book on Cluster Headache available so far.

The comprehensive work Sjaastad has produced is recognized worldwide. He clearly understands the importance of disseminating scientific knowledge. He has trained many young physicians in his facilities, offering them a chance to experience a great scientific stimulus. Professor Sjaastad has been the advisor of post-graduation students from many Countries.

Dr. Edgard Raffaelli was first Brazilian headache specialist to meet Sjaastad. During many years, he accepted in his hospital, among others, Dr. Yara Fragoso, Dr. Carlos Bordini, Dr. Deusvenir Carvalho and myself. I had the privilege to live in Norway for 3 years and defend a doctoral thesis produced under his leadership in 24 September 1992. Ottar Sjaastad has therefore influenced the headache field in Brazil to a great extent. He has also lectured here in many occasions and visited this Country 13 times. He knows Brazil very well. Ottar enjoys Guaraná – he always asks for it in Brazilian planes - and likes our culture, nature and climate. Heitor Villa-Lobos is among his favourite composers. He keeps his interest in Portuguese, a language he has no difficulties in reading. Sjaastad has even been an opponent in a thesis defence in Portugal.

Many colleagues in Norway also wrote comprehensive theses on headache disorders under his leadership. His door was never closed for young collaborators wanting a chat or a discussion on any topic of interest, day or night. He always stimulated all his pupils even after their theses defences to further improve their scientific careers, either by inviting them to write papers in collaboration, to lecture at international meetings, or simply by keeping contact.

Sjaastad has therefore a rare combination of superb clinical skills, rare scientific spirit, exceptional teaching talent and a strong leadership personality. The number of syndromes he elegantly described allows him to be considered one of the greatest clinicians of the XX Century, far beyond the frontiers of headache and neurology. Not only Norway must be proud of Ottar Sjaastad, as recognized by His Majesty the King Harald V, but actually all mankind.

*PROF. DR. MED. MAURICE VINCENT
Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*