

MEMORIAL

The love of a beloved hepatologist, Dr. Rudi Schmid

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Received: September 23, 2007 Revised: September 25, 2007

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Chang YD. The love of a beloved hepatologist, Dr. Rudi Schmid. *World J Gastroenterol* 2007; 13(48): 6612-6613

<http://www.wjgnet.com/1007-9327/13/6612.asp>

Dr. Schmid was a former dean of the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine and a liver specialist whose early studies of porphyrins led to several significant fundamental discoveries. He was the first to demonstrate that there were different forms of porphyria. He also developed the first experimental model for hepatic porphyria, a model that for many years was used for most of the work in this field and cited in hundreds of papers. His contributions were recognized when he was awarded the 1990 Friedenwald Medal by the American Gastroenterological Association, its most coveted award for lifetime achievement.

While taking a brief scientific detour from hepatology, he identified the enzymatic defect in McArdle's disease, a hereditary muscle disease, and defined its pattern of inheritance in a family in California's Central Valley.

Dr. Schmid's career as an academic administrator was equally distinguished. Recruited to UCSF in 1966 as a professor of medicine, he was the architect of one of the leading centers for gastroenterology and hepatology research, education and clinical care in the country.

He served as dean of the UCSF School of Medicine from 1983 to 1989. He often cited as his most important achievement as dean helping the faculty understand their crucial role as teachers of medical students. It was his insight that the pace of knowledge generation in basic science was far outstripping the ability of clinicians to understand and apply it in the patient setting. He strongly supported training medical students in the thinking and tools of fundamental science so that as clinicians they could understand the mechanisms and causes of disease.



Rudi Schmid, PhD, 1922-2007. Dr. Rudi Schmid, a leading academic physician and scientist in the field of hepatology died in his sleep on Saturday, October 20th, in Kentfield, California. He was 85.

By the end of his deanship scientists such as Nobel laureate J. Michael Bishop were being recognized by the students as much for their teaching as their science.

Dr. Schmid's contributions to academic medicine continued after his deanship. As associate dean for international relations in medicine and pharmacy at UCSF, he particularly focused on developing formal mechanisms for student and faculty exchanges with China, which was starting to be receptive to overtures from the West. Through the Cheng Scholars Program, which he had persuaded his friend, Dr. YT Cheng of Hong Kong, to support, he built a bridge of scientific training and collaboration that is still an active program at UCSF.

His exquisite appreciation of scientific excellence translated to unprecedented support of the basic science graduate programs at UCSF, enabling them to become among the best in the nation. He fostered an environment of interdisciplinary collaboration which is a hallmark of UCSF to this day.

During his tenure as dean he had the unusual opportunity to appoint the chairs of 11 departments, many of whom went on to extremely distinguished careers within UCSF and at the national level. These include Dr. Bruce Alberts, president emeritus of the National Academy of Sciences; Dr. Zach Hall, director emeritus of the National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Stroke; and Dr. Haile T. Debas, chancellor emeritus of UCSF.

As dedicated and serious as he was about his work, Dr. Schmid was also known for his athleticism, passion for travel and sense of fun. A skier and mountain climber for most of his life, as a young man he was on the Swiss National Ski Team and made a number of first ascents in Europe and Peru. His approach to life was deeply influenced by a poem describing the meaning of "youth" given to him as a boy by his father. In it, Samuel Ullman

describes youth as “. . . not a time of life; it is a state of mind . . . it is a matter of the will, a quality of the imagination, a vigor of the emotion . . . the temperamental predominance of courage over timidity of the appetite, for adventure over the love of ease . . .” Those who knew Dr. Schmid say that this described him exactly.

Born in 1922 in Glarus, Switzerland, to physician parents, he studied medicine in Switzerland and completed his medical training and earned his PhD at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Schmid originally vowed to pursue anything but medicine and later said that he supposed he went to medical school because he didn't know anything else. Although he originally came to the Americas after medical school to climb mountains, a series of fortuitous events directed his career first to UCSF, then to Minnesota, the NIH, Harvard, and Chicago and back to UCSF.

Against his father's wishes, he stayed in the US. In an interview several years ago, Dr. Schmid said, “America was unbelievably good to me. It was a country after the Second World War where anybody who had talent and a willingness to work and to fight intellectually could succeed.” He was describing himself in that statement.

Among the many honors Dr. Schmid received in his lifetime, most notable are election to the National Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine, the American Association of Arts and Sciences, and Leopoldina, the German Academy of Sciences. In 2005 he was awarded the UCSF Medal, its highest honor.

Served as an honorable Editor-in-Chief of WJG since 2005, Dr. Schmid had given very valuable comments and peer reviews to 24 articles related to hepatology, almost one article every month. As an esteemed hepatologist, Dr. Schmid was invited to take part in the World Chinese Congress on Digestology sponsored by WJG in October 1998. He gave a very interesting lecture, Gastroenterology in the next century: megatrends in science and practice. He highly evaluated the success of the congression, and wrote a letter to Lian-Sheng Ma, Editor-in-Chief of WJG, to discuss some confusing concepts and hot topics for Chinese Gastroenterologists and world wide experts. In the past ten years, Dr. Schmid had provided valuable suggestions and made great contributions to the development of WJG.

The staff, particularly Lian-Sheng Ma, Editor-in-Chief, are very sorrowful to Dr. Schmid's pass away on October 20, 2007. A forever memorial is dedicated to the beloved hepatologist.

Dr. Schmid is survived by Sonja, his wife of 58 years, son Peter Schmid and daughter-in-law Diane of San Francisco; daughter Isabelle, son-in-law Michael Franzen and grandson Alexander.

Donations may be sent to the Rudi Schmid Fund for Gastroenterology c/o Annamaria Flamburis University of California Box 0538 513 Parnassus Ave. San Francisco 94143-0538 or Marin Agricultural Land Trust at www.malt.com, Tahoe Rim Trail at www.tahoerimtrail.com.

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