

15 April 2013

In Tribute to Alain L. de Weck (1928-2013)

The sad demise of Prof. Alain de Weck is a great loss to me, to the World Allergy Organization (WAO) and to whole world of allergy and immunology. His immense contribution to the field of allergy and immunology cannot be fully conveyed in a few pages, since he was not only an outstanding scientist and clinician but also a founder of several important organizations including the International Association of Allergy (IAA) / International Association of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (IAACI) – now the World Allergy Organization – as well as the International Union of Immunology Societies (IUIS) and the Collegium Internationale Allergologicum (CIA).



Prof. de Weck attended his first IAA Congress in 1967 and joined the leadership of the organization in 1970. For the following 30 years he played an integral role in the development and evolution of IAA to IAACI to finally WAO and served as President from 1985-1988. He was instrumental not only in developing the organization but also bringing in several of the leaders that have led the organization over the years. He steered numerous strategic initiatives including allergen standardization. He was also an institution builder having established the Institute of Clinical Immunology in the University of Bern, a key centre for allergy and immunology.

Prof. de Weck was instrumental in supporting allergists and immunologists from various parts of the world and bringing the two disciplines together. Moreover he believed in the application of science to the clinic and thus was a great supporter of translational science. Prof. de Weck's leadership and generous outreach to colleagues, especially those in the early stages of their careers, transcended all geographical borders and included countries and regions that did not have access to learning opportunities and advances in the field. Because of his contributions they were able to learn, advance their careers, and help to establish the field in their own countries and regions.

I remember Prof. de Weck as a fine person, sincere and kind, who was always eager to discuss science in an open way. He encouraged and stimulated many of us as young fellows in our work. His keen interest in the arts and culture was also notable. He was a unique person whose humaneness touched the lives of many. I believe that we all are blessed to have known him and are deeply indebted to him for what he did for us and for the field of allergy and immunology. His legacy will remain for generations to come.

Alain, we will miss you, but you will always be in our midst.

Ruby Pawankar, MD, PhD, FAAAAI
President, World Allergy Organization

We thank Prof. Werner Pichler for the following tribute.

A Tribute to Alain L. de Weck (1928-2013)

Prof. Alain L. de Weck passed away Monday, April 8, 2013 at the age of 85.

Prof. de Weck stems from a well known family of Fribourg, a small bilingual Canton in Switzerland. He studied medicine in Geneva and Paris and was then trained as a dermatologist. He soon developed a profound interest in immunology, at a time when this discipline hardly existed. To deepen his biochemical and immunological knowledge he joined the Laboratory of Herman Eisen at the Washington University in St Louis, USA, where he studied the interaction of small molecules, in particular penicillin, with proteins. A primary characteristic of A. L. de Weck's work became obvious early on: he was interested in applying scientific knowledge to clinical practice. After returning from the USA he consequently developed skin test reagents for penicillin – some of which are still in use. He became the founding director of the Institute of Clinical Immunology at the University of Bern, Switzerland, which he led until his retirement in 1993. During his leadership this small institute became known worldwide for its allergy research and attracted many scientists from all over the world. He was knowledgeable in many areas of immunology and allergy, published more than 300 articles and edited various books and journals in the field of allergy and clinical immunology.

Beside his scientific goals, A.L. de Weck devoted much time to the promotion of allergy and allergy research worldwide. He was a member on an endless list of committees and a never resting advocate for the field of allergy. Thanks to him the standing of allergy as a discipline improved and allergy research was put on the agenda in many countries. Thereby his talent for languages (he spoke French, German and English daily, occasionally Italian and Spanish) and clever and thoughtful formulations were a big asset. His influence was far reaching: and at one time he was simultaneously President of the International Association of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, now renamed as the World Allergy Organization, and of the International Union of Immunological Societies (IUIS).

Prof. A. L. de Weck worked hard to achieve this international reputation – and he liked to work. *Research was his passion:* Thereby he was not only satisfied with some clinical observations, but he always tried to understand the mechanisms behind them. He always insisted on the connection between immunology and allergy and considered allergy and allergy research as part of immunology. *He was curious and original:* He probed new ideas in discussions and then by experiments. We at the Institute in Bern found some of his ideas quite courageous, but he was never offended if we did not agree immediately. *He was honest, self-critical, and could laugh about himself:* He knew about weaknesses and vanity in people and bore the envy of some colleagues stoically. As young researchers we were highly motivated by his enthusiasm, honesty and friendship and his obvious joy when we were successful.

Many people around the world will remember A. L. de Weck for his support and kindness. He was a man with principles, and he stood up for them. We will always keep his memory alive.

Werner J. Pichler
Bern, April 2013