

IN MEMORIAM

## Herbert Falk



In August 2008 the unexpected news was received that Herbert Falk had died. He was an active person, always present at the most important gastroenterological scientific meetings and at the famous Falk Symposia, forever restless, openminded and an inspiration to everyone.

Dr. Falk was born 86 years ago in Mulheim, near Freiburg, where he began to study pharmacy in 1947. In 1955, after his studies and his doctorate in pharmacy, he worked as a pharmacist and later took over his father's pharmacy. There he began to produce his own drops for cardiovascular disease, and sold these in his own premises and in other pharmacies in and around Freiburg. At the same time, he studied medicine, completing his dissertation in 1959. Encouraged by his initial success Dr. Falk founded his own company, Remefa GmbH & Co KG in 1960. The company name was an abbreviation of Remedia (Latin for remedy), and Falk. From 1963 the company traded under the name Dr. Falk Arzneimittel GmbH & Co KG, and from 1989 as Dr. Falk Pharma GmbH

In 1974, Chenofalk<sup>®</sup>, the first ever bile acid for the medicinal dissolution of gallbladder stones was launched. In 1978 this was followed by the second bile acid preparation, Ursofalk<sup>®</sup>, which is still the leading medication for the treatment of cholestatic liver diseases. Salofalk<sup>®</sup> became the world's first mesalazine preparation for treating inflammatory bowel diseases in 1984, and is still available in a wide variety of forms. Budenofalk<sup>®</sup>, a corticosteroid product for topical

action, was added to our range of products for the treatment of inflammatory bowel diseases in 1998.

Forty years ago the Falk Foundation was initiated and over these years, the Falk Foundation has organised more than 200 international Falk Symposia and Workshops where experts from all over the world have reported on the current state of knowledge in pure and clinical research. More than 100,000 doctors from 110 countries have so far attended these symposia and workshops. These events serve not only to provide better continuing education for doctors in the various gastroenterological and hepatological diseases, but also provide an important platform for international scientific exchange. The Falk Gastro Review literature service (journal available in print, and abstract service on CD-Rom) enables doctors to read abstracts of national and international publications, and thus keep up-to-date on the latest knowledge in gastroenterology and hepatology. In Romania before 1990 it was one of the very few sources of current information in Gastroenterology and Hepatology – Hepatology Rapid Literature Review. Later on, many Romanian physicians had the opportunity to be directly acquainted with the extent and scientific level of the Falk Symposia. It was there that we experienced Dr. Falk's personality, his good nature, kindness and friendliness, the particular way he was able to make each of his guests feel welcome. He was a man who put aside a considerable part of his revenue for medical education, a fact that displays his generosity and altruism.

Our participation in the Falk symposia was possible only after 1990, though there were a few exceptions before this time. In the beginning only a few gastroenterologists participated from Cluj, Bucharest or Timisoara. As the scientific standard and the generosity of the Falk Foundation gained wider reputation, the number of Romanian participants increased constantly. Thus, at the Falk symposium No.132 - Disease Progression and Carcinogenesis in the Gastrointestinal Tract, Freiburg in 2002, more than a quarter of the accepted papers were from Romania, while at workshop 130 the first prize was awarded to a paper from Cluj – Dan Dumitrascu et al: Rectal hypersensitivity in irritable bowel syndrome is correlated with anxiety.

Dr. Falk organised two symposia in Romania: in Bucharest (November 2000) Chronic Inflammatory Bowel Diseases – Progress and Controversies at the Turn of the Century and in Cluj (June 2000) Hepatobiliary Diseases: Cholestasis and Gallstones. At the Cluj Symposium, which he considered to be one of the most successful ones outside Germany, he was offered the Dr Honoris Causa title of

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the Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy Cluj-Napoca. It was the first academic honorary title he had accepted.

No doubt there are many symposia organized by other drug companies as well, in which the company's products are promoted and participation is covered by the hosts. Individual participation to international scientific meetings is also supported by drug companies. Nevertheless, the Falk Symposia are different, exceptional due to their frequency, consistency, high scientific level, selection and stimulation of the participants.

Dr. Falk's death is a great loss for Romanian Gastroenterology. So many gastroenterologists felt united by the many events and opportunities he always was offering. His belief is an example of modesty and a call towards seriosity and work:

*Follow your established aims, find pleasure in your work, show diligence and perseverance*

Oliviu Pascu  
Cluj-Napoca, Romania