

Obituary for Professor Frans André Van Assche

(17 December 1937 – 30 July 2018)

André Van Assche was born in Liezele (Brabant, Belgium) on December 17, 1937. He became a medical doctor at the Catholic University of Leuven in 1963. In 1968 he finished his 5-years training in Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Leuven.

In 1970 he obtained his PhD degree at the University of Leuven on “The fetal endocrine pancreas” (promotors: Prof M Renaer and Prof W Gepts).

Diabetes and hypertension in pregnancy was his main field of research and interest.

Both in the “Diabetic Pregnancy study Group” and the “International Society for the Study of Hypertension in pregnancy” he became president and a continuous influential partner.

Since he became the Head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in 1983 at the University hospital in Leuven he established a very modern, supportive and innovative relation with his students and the different supervisors of trainees in many non-academic settings in Flanders. He was well known in providing opportunity for personal growth and development of staff members and students. Andre was also a promotor of the subspecialization within the field of O&G and had a very clear vision how training and education in O&G has to be structured.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists awarded him in 1991 with the ‘Fellow ad eundum’ and the University of Newcastle honored him with the Jacobson Award.

He was very active in the UEMS (Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes) and was one of the founders of EBCOG, the European Board and College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. All three of us had the pleasure and honor to work closely with him in EBCOG and were testimony of his honesty, extreme capacity of bringing people together and his superb strategical mind which has given to EBCOG the importance it has now in the European landscape of savant societies .

In 2004 Professor Van Assche received the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa at the University of Athens in recognition of his tremendous work within EBCOG and his scientific contributions on foetal research and the provision of the highest quality of care for pregnant women in Europe.

He made a very important contribution in our understanding of the intergenerational impact of Gestational Diabetes Mellitus (GDM) on the future generations. Recently he organised a whole day consensus meeting to define a “European wide GDM screening and implementation strategy”. This culminated in the publication of the “Paris Consensus statement” which is dedicated to his memory (Hod et al., 2018; Mahmood, 2018).

Above this Professor Van Assche was a real “connoisseur of geography” and a family man. Together with his wife Lidie he did not ignore the social side of leadership. While he was the Head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology they opened their home to faculty, staff and visitors in a warm, sharing and hospitable manner.

Professor Van Assche was a productive and respected leader during his professional career and thereafter. His contributions to the many fields in which he was involved are incalculable, and he will be remembered with great affection.

We have lost a great friend and our thoughts are with his wife Lidie and the family.

WILLEM OMBELET, RUDI CAMPO, JOHAN VAN WIEMEERSCH

References

Hod M, Pretty M, Mahmood T. Joint position statement on universal screening for GDM in Europe by FIGO, EBCOG and EAPM. *Eur J Obstet Gynecol Reprod Biol.* 2018;228:329-30.

Mahmood T. Paris Consensus on Gestational Diabetes Mellitus screening 2018. *Eur J Obstet Gynecol Reprod Biol.* 2018;227:75-6.