

University of Groningen

Marcel F. Jonkman, MD, PhD (1957–2019)

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Marcel F. Jonkman, MD, PhD (1957–2019)

Marcellinus Franciscus (Marcel) Jonkman, MD, PhD, an esteemed colleague and friend, died in Groningen, the Netherlands, on January 14, 2019, from complications of pancreatic cancer.

Marcel was a professor and chair of Dermatology at the University Medical Center, University of Groningen, from 2003 until his passing. He was known to his colleagues as a results-oriented, passionate scientist and dermatologist with a commitment to strong educational and scientific performance in academia. He was passionate about achieving clinical and scientific excellence. The focus of Marcel's research and clinical activities was bullous diseases, both autoimmune and genetic, and he was a prolific author with over 470 publications. The majority of his publications dealt with epidermolysis bullosa (EB), and Marcel's ultimate dream was to deliver a cure for this disease before his retirement. Unfortunately, he did not witness the breakthrough that would lead to a cure for this group of chronic and currently incurable disorders. However, he passionately dedicated his entire career to discovering new pathomechanisms and therapeutic approaches. Marcel's major scientific achievement was the discovery of revertant mosaicism (i.e., the phenomenon in which nature itself corrects disease-causing gene mutations) in EB patients' skin and the unraveling of the genetic mechanisms behind this "natural gene therapy" (Jonkman and Pasmooij, 2009; Jonkman et al., 1997; Pasmooij et al., 2012). He subsequently explored different ways of exploiting this phenomenon to treat his patients. For example, he pursued methods in which revertant skin cells were used to generate skin grafts or skin biopsy specimens were transplanted from revertant skin patches to severely affected areas of patients' skin (Gostynski et al., 2014a, 2014b). In addition, his most recent work explored allogeneic hematopoietic cell transplantation and the antisense-mediated exon skipping approaches toward the development of



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treatment and cure for EB (Bremer et al., 2016; Gostynska et al., 2018).

Marcel's clinical work made a huge difference in the lives of many patients with EB in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the world. He founded the Dutch Blistering Center in his hometown, Groningen, and he organized multidisciplinary clinics all over the Netherlands. These clinics were organized so that each patient stayed in the same room all afternoon while specialists visited him or her, one after the other (Duipmans and Jonkman, 2010). This arrangement clearly illustrates Marcel's deep interest and respect for all aspects of his patients' autonomy and well-being, a quality that was highly appreciated by the patients.

Although Marcel did not complete his mission of curing EB, he trained and mentored a new generation of physicians and scientists who are

continuing his important work. They do it with the same determination, education, passion, and energy that Marcel devoted to his patients' well-being over the years, with the overall goal of eradicating EB as a complex and challenging disease. During his 26-year academic career, Marcel supervised 21 PhD students, both basic scientists and physician-scientists, most of whom remain in the field as members of the well-trained cadre of the next generation of scientists. Without exception, his students would describe Marcel as a visionary and a passionate supervisor who steered them in the right direction during the course of their studies. Determined and focused on one hand, he was a true pragmatist on the other, not afraid to adjust his opinions, strategy, and directions if he realized that the way in which he was moving was not leading to the desired outcome. In clinical work, Marcel was not afraid to change a diagnosis if new evidence suggested another one. In his scientific work, he was not afraid to reevaluate the purpose and goals of his research. For example, Marcel immediately closed his clinical trial aiming to treat 11 patients with the generalized severe subtype of recessive dystrophic EB with allogeneic hematopoietic cell transplantation after the first two patients died from treatment-related complications (Gostynska et al., 2018).

Marcel's education and professional life centered on the University Medical Center at Groningen. He performed his undergraduate studies there and received his MD degree from the University of Groningen in 1984. This was followed by PhD studies focusing on electron microscopy and the histology of burn wounds, and he received his PhD degree in 1989. After residency training in dermatology, Marcel was appointed as an assistant professor of dermatology at the University Medical Center, Groningen, in 1993, and after a visit as a postdoctoral fellow to Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1996, he was promoted to associate professor in 1997 and to full professor in 2002. He was appointed as the chair of the department the following year.

During his professional career, not only was Marcel active in Dutch dermatological societies, but he also served in international organizations, including as the chair of the Taskforce on Bullous Diseases by the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology, chair of the European

Reference Network of Epidermolysis Bullosa, member of the Board of Directors of the European Society for Dermatological Research, and founder and chair of the Dutch Society for Experimental Dermatology. He was a frequent invited speaker at international conferences and a guest of numerous national dermatological societies around the world. With Marcel's passing, we have lost a dear friend and colleague who dedicated his career to the study of dermatological diseases aiming toward improvement of quality of life and eventual cure for his patients.

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Peter C. van den Akker, Maria C. Bolling, Anna M.G. Pasmooij, David P. Kelsell and Jouni Uitto

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