

Otto van Eikema Hommes – February 7th 1932 - August 16th 2022

At the age of 90, Otto Hommes passed away, a formative personality, a pioneer whose presence over the past 50 years like few others has shaped the transformation of clinical MS research to what it is now.

Born in 1932 in IJlst, a small town in West Friesland, he studied medicine in Amsterdam and Utrecht, where he obtained his doctorate in 1957. From 1960 to 65 he specialised as a neurologist and psychiatrist at the Radboud University Medical Center in Nijmegen, where, after returning from a research fellowship 1965-67 at the McGill University in Montreal, he worked as a senior physician and lecturer, later as an associate professor of Experimental Neurology until his retirement in 1997. His inspiring lectures, in which he combined fascinating clinical case presentations with philosophical considerations, motivated many of his students to pursue a career in neurology. Clinically and scientifically, he focused more and more on multiple sclerosis. With many patients he built a personal relationship and they agreed in full confidence to be treated by him, even if it was in an unusual way for the time. Fully focused on finding a treatment for this devastating disease he was always searching for new unconventional roads to explore, often also ahead of his time. Otto Hommes was one of the first in a pioneering group of neurologists who, as early as the 1970s, had the courage to use immunosuppressants to treat MS even in early stages. In laboratory projects inspired by his fellowship in Montreal, he engaged in better understanding of the disease.

With Richard Gonsette and Pierre Delmotte, he organised the first conference in 1977 to present and debate the available experience with this treatment, which was still very controversial at the time. This conference, which brought together neurologists from different European Countries, reinforced the common perception that the encouraging experiences with the new therapeutic approach reported from uncontrolled observational studies needed to be tested in more methodologically demanding clinical trials. A series of controlled trials on azathioprine, cyclophosphamide and cyclosporin A followed. Five years later, Otto Hommes organized the second meeting on this topic in his academic home, Nijmegen, with about 50 active participants, including not only Europeans but also North American MS neurologists. This meeting in 1982 is considered the starting point for a loose association that Otto Hommes founded in Nijmegen with the somewhat cumbersome name "European Conference for Treatment and Research in Multiple Sclerosis", or ECTRIMS for short. In the following years - until 1994 with him as president - ECTRIMS was to develop into the largest and most important international congress for multiple sclerosis and related neuroimmunological diseases, which was soon to be held annually.

The advent of MRI intrigued Otto Hommes immensely and he was passionate about the new disease insights revealed by this technique and established contacts with pioneers in Vancouver and London. He developed a collaboration with Jaap Valk, neurologist and head of Radiology at the Free University in Amsterdam. Together they stimulated the foundation of the MS-MRI center in Amsterdam, jointly led by a neurologist and a neuroradiologist (Chris Polman and Frederik Barkhof) and generously funded by the Stichting Vrienden MS Research. A Concerted Action of the European Community he initiated and led together with Ian McDonald and others from 1990-1993 was the starting point for the Magnetic Resonance Imaging Network in MS (MAGNIMS). This European group until today remains the world-leading research network in the field of MRI and demyelinating diseases.

While still president of ECTRIMS, Otto Hommes founded the European Charcot Foundation (ECF), which until his retirement in 2012 he established as organizer of focused annual symposia on burning

questions at the intersection of clinical and basic MS research, but also as a facilitator of joint research initiatives and even of clinical trials.

Otto Hommes was particularly engaged in the involvement and promotion of young clinical scientists. Clinical MS research, not only in Europe, is deeply indebted to his inspiration and lifelong commitment to collaboration and dialogue between clinicians and researchers.

To all of us who had the privilege to meet him and discuss or work with Otto Hommes, he will be remembered with gratitude as an often unconventional, always inspiring, enthusiastic and action-motivating personality.

Ludwig Kappos, Basel

Frederik Barkhof, Amsterdam and London

Bernard Uitdehaag, Amsterdam,