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Obituary

Gilbert Thiel, 27 October 1934 to 9 January 2012

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With great sadness, we have learnt that Prof. Gilbert Thiel passed away 9 January 2012. Gilbert Thiel was head of the Department of Organ Transplantation at the University Hospital Basel from 1969 to 1985 and head of the Department of Nephrology until 1999. He was a pioneer in the field of kidney transplantation in Europe and a visionary in many areas of transplantation medicine. In 1968, he performed the first living kidney donor transplantation in Switzerland, transplanted the first diabetic patient worldwide, was a pioneer in cyclosporine-based immunosuppression, initiated the first crossover transplantation in the German-speaking part of Europe and founded the first, and still only, nationwide living donor registry in the world almost 18 years ago.

Gilbert Thiel was an outstanding personality who strongly influenced many generations of physicians. He practiced medicine with great expertise but was also a kind and caring clinician. His tireless service for his patients, his integrity and his truthfulness were unique. He considered any medical question as a challenge and worked long hours to solve difficult problems. If he was convinced of something he fought for it, even against all odds. His struggle to implement living kidney

donation is exemplary. At the time, Gilbert Thiel was sharply criticized by many leaders in the field of transplantation for his idea to transplant kidneys from living persons. In spite of this opposition, he persisted in developing this new approach. As a testament to his vision, living donation is nowadays the treatment of choice in regard to kidney replacement therapy. Gilbert Thiel was the epitome of an academic and a clear thinker. Before taking a decision, he would analyse a situation in detail and tried to anticipate every possible pitfall. However, once a decision was made, he did not hesitate for a moment and was able to convince his colleagues and faculty members to consider his new and unconventional ideas. Gilbert Thiel was and remains the lighthouse that gives us direction in transplantation medicine. Although he is no longer with us, his influence will be felt for decades.

Beyond his many other merits, Gilbert Thiel was an extremely sensitive and humble human being. With him, we are losing a visionary, a mentor, but most of all a friend. He was a great person and his death leaves a big void in our lives and in the lives of his loved ones. We want to express our deepest condolences to Gilbert's family and share their grief over this great loss.