Obituary Christian Koch 07.10.1936–15.02.2004

Christian Koch, the chairman of The Danish Cystic Fibrosis Centre at Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen, died suddenly and unexpectedly due to apoplexia. The Danish cystic fibrosis patients and their families, as well as the staff at the CF Centre, have all lost the most caring and humanistic doctor who was a centre of their lives. Christian’s wife, Britta, and their children and grandchildren have lost their beloved husband and father.

Christian Koch graduated as a medical doctor in 1963 and specialized in paediatrics. He spent 1 year as a scientist (immunology) in the United States at the Children’s Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and returned thereafter to Copenhagen where he was trained in various hospitals. At the Infectious Diseases Hospital in Copenhagen, he performed the first bone-marrow transplantation in Scandinavia. He got a research position at the Department of Clinical Microbiology at the same hospital and began his project on the bactericidal activity of human neutrophil granulocytes which resulted in his doctor thesis in 1978. His major scientific interest continued to be immunology of infectious diseases. I was fortunate enough to work as a clinical microbiologist and a research fellow at the same laboratory, and I enjoyed very much Christian’s enthusiasm and intellectual capacity and that was the start of our life-long scientific and clinical co-operation and friendship. In 1978, he was employed as a registrar at the Danish CF Centre at Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen, and in 1982, he became the chairman of the Danish CF Centre. Christian’s enormous energy, enthusiasm and intellectual capacity was a great inspiration for many young doctors who were employed in the CF Centre, but at the same time, he continued to be the very personal doctor to all of his patients. Christian always cared very much for the individual patient and he tried every possibility to treat each patient in the best possible way using the newest and most efficient therapy as soon as they had become scientifically proven. Christian was also a firm believer on the team approach and had engaged nurses, physiotherapists and the Danish Cystic Fibrosis Foundation into the work at the CF Centre. During his time as a chairman of the CF Centre, a large number of doctoral thesis and PhD thesis was produced as a result of the high scientific activity which he initiated. Most of the scientific efforts were in the area of lung infections and on diabetes mellitus, and the physiology of the chloride channels was also in focus.

Due to his enormous energy and charming personality, he soon became involved with international work. He became one of the essential members of the European CF Register and became member of the executive committee of the European Cystic Fibrosis Society in 1999. He gave numerous lectures on cystic fibrosis at international CF Congresses and he was appointed president of the European Cystic Fibrosis Congress in Copenhagen 2006, the year he was to retire (70 years).

Christian Koch was a very modish human being and he would always have the time for discussing individual problems of his patients, colleagues or staff. The international cystic fibrosis society acknowledges gratefully the enormous contribution which Christian Koch has done to the care and treatment of cystic fibrosis patients. The Danish Cystic Fibrosis Centre at Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen will continue its work because the principles which Christian has introduced are very solid, and his colleagues, headed by Dr. Tacjana Pressler, Dr. Med. Sci., will continue their work in the spirit of Christian Koch. We all express our sympathy to Christian’s wife for 41 years, Britta, and their children and grandchildren. In honour of Christian Koch, the Danish Cystic Fibrosis Association has established a “Christian Koch prize” which will be given annually to a Danish CF doctor, nurse or physiotherapist who has shown a profound humanistic attitude when dealing with CF patients.

Niels Høiby
Department of Clinical Microbiology, afsnit 9301,
Rigshospitalet, Juliane Maries Vej 22,
Copenhagen DF-2100, Denmark