

Obituary Professor Ragnar Ekholm



Professor Ragnar Ekholm died in March 2012 at the age of 90.

He pursued a triple career as creator and head of the department of anatomy at the University of Goteborg, as one of the founders of modern thyroid cell biology and of a thyroid research group still active today, and as promoter of several scientific societies.

As an MD-PHD, he was one of the founders, then the head of the department of Anatomy of Goteborg and taught anatomy for 35 years from 1952 to 1987.

As a scientist after having been with Sjostrand one of the initiators of cell electron microscopy, R. Ekholm was one of the founders of thyroid cell biology. His discoveries are still at the basis of all what we know and his publications are still consulted regularly by those in the field. He was a scientist of the old school who cared more about establishing knowledge than about self promoting himself. I still return regularly to his publications, even the very old ones.

R. Ekholm, with S.H. Wollman created the basis of what we know today of thyrocyte ultrastructure. On thyroid functional cell biology he defined the control of thyrocyte protein synthesis, the cell biology of thyroglobulin export to lumen of the follicle and its iodination in this lumen. He identified the various steps of thyroglobulin metabolism : its synthesis in the ergastoplasm, its intracellular transport and export to the lumen, its iodination at the apical border of the cell.

After creating the methodology for short tem culture of isolated follicles, he developed with Bjorkman our knowledge of the H₂O₂ generation by the cell and its control. He analyzed the toxic effects of this H₂O₂ on the cell and the role of glutathione peroxydase in preventing it. The later work of our group was based on his findings. With Nilsson , they created the most physiological in vitro model for the study of iodide transport (transwell methodology) and provided the data which still now are used to

validate results obtained on simpler but not physiological models. All this work made him the reference at thyroid congresses and in reviews for thyroid cell biology.

R. Ekholm was among those who in 1965 initiated the European Thyroid Association and has been since then a scientific pillar of this association, becoming its president in 1983. He also founded and animated the Swedish Thyroid Research Planning Group.

R. Ekholm was a great scientist and a gentleman. All those who knew him will remember him as such and those who did not will still use his articles for a long time. We deeply regret losing him.

Dumont J. E.