



Bror-Axel Lamberg in Memoriam

Professor emeritus Bror-Axel Lamberg (M.D., Ph.D.) died at his home on May the 4th 2014 at the age of 91 years. During several decades he was the leading expert on thyroid diseases in Finland, a highly respected endocrinologist and well-known and esteemed also internationally.

Lamberg started his academic career as a medical student at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Helsinki. The leading thyroid expert at that time was professor Johannes Wahlberg, who introduced Lamberg to thyroid diseases and suggested to him research on this topic.

In 1955 Lamberg became a specialist in internal medicine. Thereafter he held several positions in this field at the Helsinki University Hospital. In 1971 he received a personal extraordinary professorship in endocrinology, again at the University of Helsinki. He held this position until he retired in 1989 at the age of 66 years. In 1956 he was a research fellow in John Stanbury's group, the Thyroid Clinic at Massachusetts General Hospital.

Lamberg's medical thesis dealt with the use of radioactive phosphorous for the measurement of pituitary thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH). At that time there was no assay for measuring TSH directly. This method became widely used, and even the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in USA used it for standardizing different TSH preparations.

Lamberg studied radioiodine excretion in urine in various populations in different areas of Finland. Low values were found especially in the Eastern parts of Finland. This observation was connected to the frequent occurrence of nodular goitre, particularly in regions with marked iodine deficiency. In Finland multinodular goitre, which is uncommon in the Western world, was much more common than diffuse goitre. Lamberg was involved when the decision was taken to iodinate table salt in Finland and was the principal investigator of its consequences. In some regions nodular goitre occurred in more than half of the adult population, but after the introduction of the iodination programme the occurrence of goitre, especially multinodular goitre, started to decline and had almost disappeared in younger people in 20 years and in the whole population in the beginning of the 21st century.

In his subsequent research work Lamberg paid much attention to the treatment of different forms of hyperthyroidism. He also studied thyroid autoimmunity in Basedow's disease (Graves' disease) and the exophthalmus syndrome. With his co-workers he established guidelines for the treatment of different forms of thyroid malignancies. His research group also developed improved methods for the determination of thyroid hormones and thyroid stimulating antibodies. Various forms of peripheral resistance to thyroid hormone were studied. He was also a national pioneer in

the field of nuclear medicine, being the first to use radioactive iodine in clinical research in his country.

In Finland in the late 1960s there were few facilities for clinicians to perform research in the hospital. With a group of medical doctors he founded a private research institute, Minerva Foundation Institute for Medical Research in Helsinki (Helsingfors). His daily clinical work took place at the Helsinki University Hospital. After being appointed professor of endocrinology his research work was conducted at the Minerva Institute, where several young scientists joined him.

Lamberg was a valued teacher of several generations of medical students. He wrote two text books on thyroid diseases, one in Finnish and some years later another in Swedish. He also published two most interesting books on the history of goitre, again one in Finnish and another in Swedish. Lamberg was often invited to give lectures in the other Nordic countries, and functioned 15 times as an opponent at medical dissertations in Sweden. He also chaired several international, Scandinavian and national meetings, and was appointed honorary member of medical and scientific societies in Finland and other European countries.

Lamberg was one of the founding fathers of the European Thyroid Association – ETA (1967) and was a member of its executive committee in 1967-69. He was chairman of the organizing committee for the 7th ETA meeting held in 1976 in Helsinki. The European Thyroid Association was very important to him. He attended all meeting over the years, taking part in the discussions and established a large network of friends and colleagues all over Europe through ETA .

During his career Lamberg received several medical prizes. He was awarded two most prestigious medical prizes in Finland, the Äyräpää (1979) and the Runeberg Prize (1985). In 1984-98 he was the chairman of the Nordisk Insulinfond (Copenhagen).

In high-school Lamberg studied classical topics, including Latin and Greek, which influenced his later cultural activities. After retiring from academic life he studied the history and architecture of Rome, which culminated in a book on the medieval Mars field, *Campus Martius in the Middle Ages*. Late in life he and his wife Carin, an ophthalmologist, published five books on the genealogy of their families. His memories (*Minnen*) in two volumes consist of 700 pages, books revealing his profound interest in music, particularly opera and chamber music. He played altoviolin throughout his life.

Lamberg, like most Finns of his generation, fought in 1941-44 in the Russo-Finnish military conflict, a part of WWII.

As a person Bror-Axel Lamberg - called Atte among friends – was an empathic and loyal gentleman, characteristics which gave him many friends among colleagues of different generations. He trained a remarkable number of research students, who continued his work in thyroidology and nuclear medicine. Lamberg treated all of his patients as individuals. In each case the treatment was tailored as if art and science were combined. During medical conferences in Helsinki Atte and Carin often invited participants to their home to enjoy the hospitality of the family. His memories ended with the following sentence - *It has been a good life*.

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