

LAUDATIO: Prof. Dr Jon van Rood Honorary Membership – Prague 2007 By Dr Guido G. Persijn, ESOT

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It is a great honour for me to address a few words relating to the honorary membership of the European Society for Organ Transplantation, to my teacher and mentor Prof. Dr Jon van Rood.

Why this honorary membership? Well, to answer that question, one has always to go back into history. For the younger ones among us: From history you can always learn. And as Churchill already said in 1944: ‘The longer you can look back, the farther you can look forward’.

Who is Jon van Rood?

Born in The Hague in 1926, thus being 81 years of age now, but as you all should know: ‘Age is a matter of mind and if you do not mind, age does not matter’, Jon is still active in the field of immunohaematology, bone marrow transplantation and other related aspects.

After his MD training at the Leiden University and becoming specialist in Internal Medicine at the Leiden University Hospital, he was appointed in 1957 as head of the newly founded Department of Immunohaematology and Blood Bank of the same Leiden University Hospital. After receiving his PhD doctorate in 1962, his thesis having been entitled ‘Leucocyte grouping: A method and its application’, and based on his first famous publication in Nature, he worked for 1 year in the Immunology Department of the Public Health Research Institute in New York. In 1969, he was appointed Professor of Internal Medicine and in 1976 he became Director of the Haematology Department of the Leiden University Hospital. He is also one of the founders of the Leiden Institute of Immunology.

In 1967, van Rood initiated and set up the Eurotransplant Organization (ET), the first international organ exchange organization in the world. A brilliant idea! Recently the 40th anniversary was celebrated during the annual Eurotransplant meeting.

In short, since its start more than 122 000 patients have been transplanted with organs from postmortem donors namely 79 000 kidneys, 21 000 livers, 14 000 hearts, 4000 lungs and 4200 pancreases. And with very good transplant results.

The Eurotransplant model was followed in many other countries in different parts of Europe and in the US.

Actually, Eurotransplant can serve as a model for politicians when they are discussing a unified Europe because ET is really ‘L’Europe avant la lettre’ and that already 40 years ago!

Jon was also the founder and initiator of many other organizations, just to name a few: The Europdonor Foundation in 1970 (for bone marrow donation and transplantation) the European Foundation of Immunogenetics in 1985, Eurotissue later named Bio Implant Services (for tissue transplantation) in 1987, the World Marrow Donor Association in 1994, etc. etc.



Besides all this, he was and is still participating in many advisory committees and he was and is still in Editorial Boards of many transplant related journals such as Human Immunology, Tissue Antigens, Transplantation Proceedings, Clinical Transplantation and so on.

For all this enormous work, he was honoured and awarded many, many times. He has given many famous honorary lectures like the Ceppelini Lecture, the Niels Jerne Lecture, the Medawar Prize Lecture etc. etc. He was honoured at least 14 times with special awards and prizes like the Karl Landsteiner Memorial Award, the Robert Koch Medal, The Wolf Prize Israel, The Rose Payne Award and many others.

He received also the Doctorate Honoris Causa of eight famous universities and he was honoured with knighthoods by many different countries. For example, our Queen Beatrix awarded him with the Order of Knighthood of Orange Nassau. Also the governments of Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany and Austria honoured him.

But back to his work, which centred around the following topics: Genetics of the histocompatibility antigens, organ and bone marrow transplantation, genetic factors in diseases, blood banking, clinical immunology and haematology. This all has resulted in for example:

- 1 The first batch of HLA-matched platelet transfusions in the treatment of aplastic anaemia, which were given in Leiden in 1964.
- 2 The role of HLA-matching in improving kidney allograft survival and as a consequence the foundation of Eurotransplant as already mentioned.
- 3 The beneficial effect of pretransplant blood transfusions on kidney transplantation and the possible explanation for this effect by sharing a HLA-DR or class II antigen between blood transfusion donor and recipient.
- 4 The NIMA-effect, the induction of a form of partial tolerance of the child towards the mother with possible important consequences for organ and bone marrow transplantation and maybe also for the pathogenesis of auto-immune diseases.
- 5 The supporting role for the establishment of numerous, at least 30, tissue typing centres all over the world.
- 6 The first bone marrow transplantation in the Netherlands was performed in Leiden with his help in 1968, also 40 years ago, and the role of HLA-matching in bone mar-

row transplantation especially in children with severe combined immunodeficiency. The survival is now over 80%. All this led to the foundation of Eurodonor.

7 HLA and disease studies, in which the department played an enormous role. For example, the relationship of HLA with diseases like leukaemia, leprosy and many others.

8 Last but not least, van Rood's department served and functioned as a training centre and learning institute for over 50 PhD students.

9 All this important work has resulted in at least 462 articles in peer-reviewed journals.

We all learned much about Jon van Rood, not only from the data and findings which were presented on many national and international transplant congresses and meetings but also from his remarks, comments, ideas, his drive, his personal outpourings as well.

He is also an excellent organizer and networker. When the idea came up nearly 30 years ago, to set up a European Society for Organ Transplantation, our Society thus, he played a very diplomatic and supportive role. This has led also to the development of the successful Society we are today!

The impact of Jon's scientific work and his personality on the development of transplantation in its widest sense in Europe and throughout the world cannot be underestimated. We thank you for all that Jon. But behind each great man stands also a great wife. We have to thank his lovely wife Sacha who was and is the great support behind him, not only behind but besides him and sometimes in front of him; without her he could not have reached where he has reached. Thank you Sacha.

Coming to the end of the laudatio, also the two very important prizes you won should be mentioned here: (i) the Stella-Artois-Baillet Latour Prize in Belgium in 1985 and (ii) the Heineken Prize in Amsterdam in 1990.

Why mentioning that now? Well after these two 'beer-related' prizes it is so special today that you will be awarded in this country, the Czech Republic with its famous beer city Pilsen, where it all began as they say, with the Honorary Membership of the European Society for Organ Transplantation. Congratulations.

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