Obituary for Prof. Robert Steiner

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Professor Robert Emil Steiner, CBE; born Feb. 1st, 1918—died Sept. 12th, 2013

Robert Steiner was the outstanding British radiologist of the second half of the twentieth century. When he was appointed Lecturer/Hon. Consultant in 1950 at Hammersmith Hospital, then the British Postgraduate Medical School, X-ray departments had no academic presence. His research activities, centred on the cardiovascular system, soon transformed that. By 1961 he had become the only Professor of Diagnostic Radiology in the University of London, and led a department that the British Medical Journal later described as a “beacon light” to British radiology. He fostered a model department where service to patients, teaching and research lived side-by-side, of equal importance. He pioneered clinico-radiological meetings where clinicians would start their day in the Radiology Department before seeing their patients. Indeed such meetings were the fore-runners of the now prevalent multidisciplinary meeting.

Born in Vienna, he was forced to leave his studies at the University of Vienna and emigrated to Dublin where he qualified as a doctor (and met his charming wife Gertrude). Then came a succession of junior hospital posts, culminating in training in radiology at Sheffield. It was the Hammersmith Hospital’s very good fortune that he next applied for, and was appointed to, a Lecturer/Honorary Consultant post at that institution. As Professor, he completely revolutionised the Radiology Department, making it the envy of radiologists around the world—even though its success at that time was more based on the skill, enthusiasm and dedication of its staff members under Robert’s inspired leadership, rather than on show-case equipment and facilities. As a “first-in-last-out” leader who revelled in hard work himself, he gained the life-long respect of all who worked with him.

Fame of this unique endeavour spread rapidly, attracting enthusiastic trainees in radiology as well as many visitors from abroad. Robert Steiner’s exceptional and warm personality was an important ingredient, earning him much devotion. His massive research effort is attested by the well over 200 medical papers and books he published. And success was marked by many honours, including Gold Medals from the Royal College of Radiologists and the European Society of Radiology. He was President of the British Institute of Radiology (1972–73), Warden and then President of the Royal College of Radiologists (1977–80). Even after retirement he continued to be active, in the new discipline of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), at the Hammersmith Centre named after him. The pioneering Hammersmith contributions to magnetic resonance imaging gave him immense and very justifiable pride.

His own research work was mainly related to the cardiovascular system. Angiography was one of the rapidly developing subspecialties at the time and teamwork was essential in the days of spring-loaded cassettes and wet film processing. Needless to say, Robert extracted 110 % from each and every

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member of staff by means of his own infectious enthusiasm. His publications were prodigious for research workers of that era and his educational contribution was immense. The *Recent Advances in Radiology* volumes, which he edited, were essential reading in the 1970s and 80s. His book, *Clinical Disorders of the Pulmonary Circulation* (1960, with Daley & Goodwin), still makes good reading today. As Editor of the British Journal of Radiology he had great insight into what was going on in other areas within Radiology.

Robert Steiner, quite simply, was the outstanding British academic radiologist of his time; he was responsible for de-

veloping the careers of hundreds of radiologists who went on to develop distinguished careers of their own. Partly because of his own European roots and partly due to his love for disseminating good practice, he was extremely supportive to visitors from home and abroad and his antennae embraced the entire radiological world. He changed radiology very much for the good.

Acknowledgement Professor Thomas Sherwood, who worked very closely with Robert Steiner, contributed handsomely to this obituary.