

OBITUARY

Gösta Karpe, MD, PhD

Gösta Karpe, a pioneer in clinical electroretinography and one of the founders of our society, died on September 2, 1990, at age 82, after a long illness.

Professor Karpe's PhD thesis on 'The Basis of Clinical Electroretinography' had a great impact on the European ophthalmologic community. In this work, Karpe described a method for obtaining reliable recordings of the ERG in patients. He constructed a contact lens electrode that made it possible to record the human ERG without damaging the cornea. Consequently, he was able to record and describe the main features of the a- and b-wave responses in several human retinal diseases, such as retinitis pigmentosa and arterial and venous circulatory disturbances. After the thesis was published in the mid-1940s, several other leading European ophthalmologists, such as François, Franceschetti, Henkes and Straub, became interested in clinical electroretinography and began using the same or similar techniques in their laboratories. Because of World War II, however, European and American scientists could not effectively exchange information. Thus, Karpe's work was done independently of Professor Lorrin Riggs' research in the same area, which



Karpe, Granit and François (left to right) at the 1984 ISCEV Symposium in Stockholm

was published somewhat earlier in the United States, and which was of great importance to American ophthalmologists.

Karpe obtained the inspiration for his work from Professor Ragnar Granit (deceased in March 1991), who discovered many of the basic principles of the ERG. Together with European ophthalmologists François, Franceschetti, Henkes, and Straub and Dr Hermann Burian of the United States, Karpe formed the group of founding fathers of our society. In 1958 they devised the constitution of the International Society for Clinical Electretinography (ISCERG), the name of which was later changed to the International Society for Clinical Electrophysiology of Vision (ISCEV). Karpe was elected the first president and served in that capacity until 1973, when he was succeeded by Dr Harold Henkes, at which time he became honorary president and an honorary member. During Karpe's presidency, the society grew substantially in the number of members as well as in scientific achievements.

Karpe obtained both his MD and PhD degrees from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden. He was professor and chairman of the Department of Ophthalmology at the Karolinska Institute from 1949 to 1974. Under his leadership, a large number of scientific papers in clinical electroretinography were published, including 13 PhD theses. Several scientists from the international field visited his department. I was fortunate to have had training in clinical ophthalmology in Professor Karpe's department.

I will always remember Professor Gösta Karpe as one of the fathers of clinical electroretinography and one of the founders of our society.

Sven Erik Nilsson, MD, PhD
*Professor and Chairman
Department of Ophthalmology
University of Linköping
Linköping, Sweden*