

## Obituary for Hikoo Shirakabe, M.D., 1921–1994

Professor Hikoo Shirakabe, one of the transforming figures in the world of gastroenterology and gastrointestinal radiology, died on December 29, 1994 from abdominal complications of carcinoma of the lung. Professor Shirakabe graduated from Chiba Medical College in 1945 and started his professional career in the First Department of Internal Medicine at Chiba University. In 1968 he became professor and chairman of the Department of Internal Medicine at Juntendo University in Tokyo. The writings of Professor Shirakabe and his disciples are prolific. American radiologists will be most familiar with his two seminal volumes *Double Contrast Studies of the Stomach* and *Atlas of X-ray Diagnosis of Early Gastric Cancer*.

His professional career involved many aspects of gastroenterology and among these was his pioneering work in the development of double contrast radiography of the stomach and its application to the diagnosis of early gastric cancer. He was responsible for the development of a screening program for gastric cancer which was instituted in Japan and combined the benefits of radiography and endoscopy. This program has allowed for the detection of gastric cancer in its early stages with marked improvement in the prognosis of this deadly disease. More recently, Professor Shirakabe showed great interest in the early diagnosis of the disease of the esophagus, small bowel, and colon as well.

Professor Shirakabe's work has saved the lives of many patients with gastric cancer. His work and his scientific method have profoundly affected the development of modern gastrointestinal radiology. His method of minute radiologic pathologic correlation with the aim of producing a point to point correspondence between radiologic and pathologic findings has become the cornerstone of modern gastrointestinal radiology. He often spoke of the analysis of "point, line and area" as the minimalist building blocks of radiologic analysis. His scientific work has served as a bridge between physicians around the world. He understood that the artistic nature of the radiographic image would act as an international language. In Dr. Maruyama's book *Polyps and Carcinoma of the Large Bowel*, he wrote "the radiograph has now turned into a product of art" and "a radiograph acts as an internationally common language



and allows immediate mutual understanding." These are sentiments that we share passionately and have shaped the international flavor of the Society of Gastrointestinal Radiologists.

Professor Shirakabe retired from Juntendo University in 1987 and became the directing chief of the Central Clinic of the Foundation for the Detection of Early Gastric Carcinoma in Tokyo. In his native Japan he has been the head of many societies and has received the highest national honors including the Takeda Award for Medicine, the Asahi Prize, and Purple Ribbon Medal awarded by the Emperor of Japan. He has also been honored by medical societies throughout the world including Peru, Germany, Belgium, and China. In the United States, there are many radiologists who consider themselves to be Professor Shirakabe's direct disciples. His involvement in the Society of Gastrointestinal Radiologists has led to important professional and social contact between American and Japanese physicians. His achievements have been well recognized and honored in the United States. In 1985 he was awarded honorary membership in the RSNA and in 1986 he was awarded the Cannon Medal of the Society of Gastrointestinal Radiologists for a lifetime of outstanding contribution to Gastrointestinal Radiology. In 1992 he delivered the annual Eugene P. Pendergrass Lecture at the University of

Pennsylvania and he and his colleagues participated in a symposium in his honor.

Notwithstanding the detailed nature of Professor Shirakabe's work, he was a man of wide and philosophical vision. He was a man of unique humor and charm. He has had an extraordinary and personal effect

in transforming the world of Gastrointestinal Radiology. I know that there are many radiologists worldwide who think about him and miss him every day.

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