

## A tribute to Herbert Fleisch

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The scientific community of metabolic bone diseases is saddened by the loss of Professor Herbert Fleisch, who passed away in his garden in Pully, near Lausanne, on 15 May 2007.

Herbert Fleisch contributed greatly to the development of the field of scientific knowledge about metabolic bone diseases and their treatment. His pioneering work led to the discovery of a new class of therapeutic agents, the bisphosphonates. The results of his research at the Institute of Experimental Surgery in Davos over the past 40 years have considerably influenced knowledge about bone and mineral metabolism. The clinical application of bisphosphonates in patients with osteoporosis, bone metastases, Paget's disease of bone and even osteogenesis imperfecta has contributed to improving markedly the quality of life of millions of patients throughout the world suffering from metabolic bone diseases.

Herbert Fleisch was born in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1933 and studied medicine at the universities of Lausanne, Zurich and Oxford (UK). He began his career as a physician at the institute of physiology of the University of Lausanne, the institute of which his father was the director. He then went to the department of radiation biology in Rochester, New York. At Rochester, William Neuman introduced him to the bone mineral field, thereby determining the main direction of Dr. Fleisch's scientific career. Back in Switzerland, he headed the Laboratory of Experimental Surgery in Davos and began to scale rapidly the slopes of academia. Dr. Fleisch became privat docent (equivalent of assistant professor) at the University of Basel in 1966. One year later, at the age of 34, he became a full professor at the Berne University Medical School and director of the Department of Pathophysiology, where he remained until his retirement in 1997. Under his leadership, the Berne institute became an essential stop for scientists from around the world. Herbert Fleisch taught many generations of researchers in the field of bone metabolism and mineral homeostasis, and these experts then disseminated

this knowledge both in Switzerland and abroad. For example, several members of the service of bone diseases at Geneva University Hospital were trained by Herbert Fleisch, and they perpetuate the tradition of basic and clinical research he initiated.

Dr. Fleisch chaired numerous scientific societies devoted to bone and mineral research, amongst them the International Bone and Mineral Society and the European Calcified Tissues Society. He was instrumental in the creation of the European Foundation for Osteoporosis in 1987, which became the International Osteoporosis Foundation in 1998, presently comprising 172 national societies throughout the world in 82 countries, representing 80% of the world population. He was associate editor of the journal *Bone*. He set up the database Osteovision, which contributed to the highly successful online journal *BoneKey*. In 1992, Dr. Fleisch received the Bill Neuman award from the American Society of Bone and Mineral Research, named for the mentor who played a major influence in orienting his research and academic career. Dr. Fleisch's book "Bisphosphonates and bone diseases: from the bench to the patient" has been re-edited several times and translated into many languages since its first publication in 1993. He organised numerous scientific exchanges, particularly in Davos over the last 20 years.

After his retirement in 1997, Herbert Fleisch remained very active, working within the International Osteoporosis Foundation, pursuing the organisation of the Davos congresses and his activities as associate editor. His enthusiastic and generous personality, his fabulous skills as teacher and lecturer and his pleasure for living were always shared with his numerous friends. His departure leaves a large empty space, but his accomplishments will remain.

René Rizzoli  
on behalf of the International Osteoporosis Foundation family