



Obituary Prof. Dr. André Wambersie MD, PhD (1930–2020)

H. Menzel¹ · R. Pötter² · K. R. Trott³

Received: 10 March 2021 / Accepted: 5 April 2021 / Published online: 6 May 2021
© Springer-Verlag GmbH Germany, part of Springer Nature 2021

The distinguished radiobiologist and radiation oncologist, Professor André Wambersie, died on November 27, 2020.

André Wambersie was Emeritus Full Professor at the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) and former Head of the Radiobiology and Radiation Protection Research Unit and Chairman of the Radiation Therapy, Neutron Therapy and Curietherapy Department of UCL in Brussels, Belgium. After his retirement (1995), Prof. Wambersie was visiting Professor at the Arthur James Cancer Hospital of the Ohio State University and Guest Professor at the Medical University of Vienna.

André Wambersie received his MD degree in 1957 at UCL and his PhD degree in 1967. In 2002, he received an honorary PhD degree from the Ohio State University. From 1962 to 1965, he undertook post-graduate training in radiobiology and radiation therapy at the Institut Gustave-Roussy in Villejuif, France, in the department of Prof. Maurice Tubiana. The advanced training he received at this unique centre of translational and clinical radiobiology had a lasting influence on his scientific and clinical outlook, in particular awakening his interest in the influence of cell and tissue kinetics on radiation effects. Here his early radiobiological research focussed on dose fractionation effects *in vivo*, particularly investigating the importance of the dose per fraction and the initial slope of the cell survival curve. This work set experimental foundations for the currently used linear-quadratic model of clinical dose fractionation. His combined focus on medical and basic radiobiology culminated in the textbook “Radiobiologie” which was the collaborative product of three of the leading radiation oncologists, Maurice Tubiana, Jean Dutreix and André Wambersie. This Opus set the standard for medical radiobiology and was rapidly

translated into English to become the worldwide standard textbook for aspiring radiotherapists.

In the turbulent times of the mid-1960s, he was appointed professor of radiotherapy at the Catholic University of Leuven (UCL) and immediately was caught up in separation of the University into Flemish and French-speaking entities. For the French-speaking UCL in the fields across the language border, a new campus and a new town, Louvain-la-Neuve was constructed. André had to “emigrate” as well, but took the challenge as a chance to build up a brand-new radiotherapy and radiobiology department at the great hospital St. Luc in Brussels in close cooperation with the flourishing engineering faculty in Louvain-la-Neuve. His early clinical research there focused on High-LET radiation therapy. In 1978, he initiated a fast neutron therapy programme at the research cyclotron of the University in Louvain-la-Neuve. In 1991, he started a pilot programme on radiation therapy with high-energy protons. He played a significant role in the coordination and propagation of the use of high-LET radiation in Europe and was Chairman as well as secretary of the Heavy-Particle Therapy Group of EORTC (European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer), member of the EULIMA project (European Light Ion Medical Accelerator) and of the FP 7 project ULICE (Union of Light Ion Centers in Europe).

His profound knowledge of concepts and practice in radiation oncology and his rigour in scientific methodology were the basis for his successful and numerous contributions to international standardizations of language and parameters for clinical practices which is understood and applied by all professionals in radiotherapy as well as scientists, worldwide. He initiated the ICRU report series on ‘Prescribing, Recording and Reporting’ of all current radiation treatment modalities documenting his enduring effort, his ingenuity and skill in international negotiations. André Wambersie put great emphasis on his work in the International Commission on Radiation Units and Measurements (ICRU). He became Commissioner of ICRU in 1969, served over the years on numerous ICRU Report Committees. In 1993, he became ICRU Vice Chairman and served as Chairman from 1997 to

✉ K. R. Trott
klaustrott@yahoo.it

¹ Honorary Chairman of ICRU, Heidelberg, Germany

² Department Radiation Oncology, Medical University Vienna, Währinger Gürtel 18-20, Wien, Austria

³ Munich, Germany

2006. In 2009, he became Honorary Chairman of ICRU. He became a renowned authority and was in regular demand by international organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the European Commission, and the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR).

Professor Wambersie received the Röntgen Plakette (Germany) in 1990, delivered the Eighth John R. Cameron Lecture (Madison) in 1994, and received the Pierre et Marie Curie Medal (Belgium) in 2006. He was elected an Honorary Member of the Austrian Society for Radiation Oncology in 1999. He received the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) Iridium 192 Award from the European brachytherapy community during the ESTRO Congress in Vienna, Austria, in 2014.

André was also a wonderful teacher. When in 1992 the European Commission planned to support a European Master of Science degree in radiation biology, taught at five of the leading European institutions he was the obvious choice for running the medical radiobiology module. The weeks that he taught in Brussels and Louvain-la-Neuve were always the most popular with the students—and André himself enjoyed it greatly. He continued teaching advanced students and doctors in training until into his late 80 s, sharing his enthusiasm along with his broad knowledge of radiation medicine as visiting professor in the US and, particularly, in Vienna. For almost two decades André was actively involved in Vienna in postgraduate teaching and mentoring multidisciplinary research (Clinical, Physics, Radiobiology) and in promoting the ICRU report 89 on brachytherapy in cervical cancer. André supported intensively European and Austrian Heavy Particle Therapy activities such as “ENLIGHT”, “ULICE” and “Med Austron”.

His career has impacted the lives not only of countless patients but also entire fields of radiation research and

clinical practice. André enjoyed and sought out collaborations with colleagues—many of them becoming life-long friends. He will live on in these friendships as much as in his scientific achievements.

André Wambersie is survived by his wife Sinette, 5 children and 14 grandchildren.

H. Menzel, R. Pötter, K.R. Trott



André Wambersie 2018

Declarations

Conflict of interest The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.