

In Memoriam: Professor Renée Habib 1924–2009

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The world of nephrology is mourning after the loss of one of his towering figure, Renée Habib. She was born in 1924 in Casablanca in a French Sephardic family. After her highly successful studies in the *Lycée Français*, her parents were not enthusiastic about her wish to become a doctor. At that time, such ambitions were not always considered appropriate for a woman, and she initially studied English with the intention of becoming a teacher. At the end of the Second World War, she moved from Morocco to Algiers and thence to Paris to achieve her ambition of entering medical school. After a distinguished undergraduate career, she graduated with her MD in 1953. Pediatric training was undertaken under the direction of Professor Robert Debré, one of the founding fathers of modern pediatrics. She decided to specialize in pathology and trained in London with Professor Martin Bodian at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street. She met her eventual husband, Elio, while they were medical students. Renée and, indeed, all their friends in pediatrics throughout the world know the important role that Elio played in helping and supporting her throughout her career, while he became himself a distinguished pediatrician.

Medical research in France in the 1950s was poorly developed and poorly supported, with little administrative structure and almost no laboratory facilities or funding; thus, few people elected to undertake research as a career. Professor Debré suggested that she should become a full-

time investigator in Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale (INSERM) in 1953, then in its infancy, but now, 50 years later, a strong institution with 390 research units and nearly 5,000 people engaged in biomedical research. Her career within INSERM progressed successfully, and she was promoted to Director of Research (corresponding to a university chair) in 1967. In 1979, she was nominated as Director of the INSERM Unit 192, titled *Unité de Recherche sur les Maladies Rénales de l'Enfant*, a laboratory created specifically for her.

Initially with Professor Debré, Renée worked in a very small room in the basement of a prefabricated building at the Necker-Enfants Malades Hospital, but in 1972, her unit was transferred into new laboratories built by INSERM, although not perhaps large enough at that time for all the activities undertaken. In that laboratory, she gathered around her a small team of people devoted full time to research, and all of them today well known in the world of pediatric nephrology: Marie-Claire Gubler, Claire Kleinknecht, Micheline Levy, and Corinne Antignac. She worked in this laboratory with a team of highly efficient technicians, Mireille Lacoste, Agnès Beziau, Mireille Sich, and Colette Naizot, particularly dedicated to her research. Several clinicians, Michel Broyer, Patrick Niaudet, and Marie-France Gagnadoux, also had the privilege to work with her during almost their whole career, and it has always been a close and fruitful collaboration. Together they formed a sort of family, with Renée as the senior member directing studies and administering, with warm friendship, colored outspokenness and firmness.

Renée's primary interest in pediatric nephrology developed in collaboration with Professor Pierre Royer, a great scientific and medical personality who created the first school of pediatric nephrology where French and European pediatricians who eventually develop their own groups

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were trained. With him, she began to study renal biopsy material from sick children. She also worked with Professor Jean Hamburger, participating in the creation of a renal pathology laboratory in the adult clinic. Since then, her professional life has been devoted to studying the pathology of renal disease, particularly in children. It is no surprise to those who know her tremendous energy, strong temperament, academic rigor, and critical judgment that she made major contributions to pediatric nephrology until her retirement in 1993—and even after.

Her international reputation developed with the first symposium on renal biopsies organized by the CIBA Foundation in London in 1961, where she presented a paper on the pathological classification of nephrotic syndrome from the Necker pathology laboratory: thus, a star was born. The same year, she participated in the first international course on pediatric nephrology, organized by Professors Royer and Mathieu in the Centre International de L'Enfance in Paris, which became the basis of the first book on pediatric nephrology (P. Royer, R. Habib and H. Mathieu (1963) *Problèmes actuels de néphrologie infantile*). From then on, she has been involved in all the important international events concerning pediatric nephrology and the pathology of kidney disease. In 1967, she was invited to be one of the consultant pathologists with J. Churg and J. Bernstein in the International Study of Kidney Disease in Children (ISKDC), set up by Henry Barnett, and during the next 25 years, she looked at several hundred specimens of renal biopsies, which were the basis for the research undertaken by this group. In 1967, she became a founding member of the European Society for Paediatric Nephrology (ESPN) and continued to participate in all ESPN meetings, presenting original papers, giving invited lectures, and playing an active part in the life of the society. She organized the Second International Congress of Paediatric Nephrology in Paris in 1971 with Professors Royer and Mathieu, and she was president of the unforgettable 1991 ESPN meeting in Paris. She was involved in the formation of the International Pediatric Nephrology Association (IPNA) with Ira Greifer, played an important role in founding of Asociación Latinoamericana de Nefrología Pediátrica (ALANEPE)—the Latin-American Pediatric Nephrology Association, with its fourth congress being organized in her honor in Cuba in 1996, and was a member of the International Society of Nephrology (ISN) Council. Amongst many other international activities, she was a member of the editorial board of nine journals and participated actively in the creation of our journal, *Pediatric Nephrology*. She was also a tireless traveler, always ready to teach renal pathology in the five continents, and it would be easier to enumerate the countries where she was not invited rather than those that she visited. She was an outstanding teacher and mentor, devoted to training the next

generation of clinicians and investigators around the globe. Young and not-so-young pathologists or nephrologists from all over the world sought training in her laboratory, and well over 100 had the opportunity to be taught by her.

Renée Habib's work encompassed almost all of the pathology of renal disease in children. Her contributions are particularly important and original in a number of areas. Two initial major contributions were the full description of the specific renal pathology associated with hemolytic uremic syndrome and the first description with Professor Royer of oligomeganephronia in 1962. Thanks to the availability of renal biopsy and introduction of electron microscopy and immunofluorescence, she was able to study thousands of patients with various nephropathies and play a major role in classifying glomerular disease with Jack Churg, Richard White, and Jay Bernstein. In children with idiopathic nephrotic syndrome, she described the relationship between minimal change disease, focal segmental glomerulosclerosis, and diffuse mesangial proliferation. An important contribution was describing the glomerular lesion she observed in infants with nephrotic syndrome, which she termed "diffuse mesangial sclerosis". She was the first to report this particular glomerular lesion in Denys-Drash syndrome, and was also the first to describe the renal involvement in the Alagille syndrome. She provided a precise description of nephronophthisis, enabling the collection of a homogenous series of affected families. It was the basis of molecular research leading to localization on chromosome 2 (1992), then to identification of the first gene causing this disease. Her studies encompassed Schonlein-Henoch nephritis and immunoglobulin A (IgA) nephropathy, which she always considered to be the same renal disease; membranous glomerulonephritis; and membranoproliferative glomerulonephritis. Other contributions improved our knowledge of Alport's syndrome, acute glomerular nephritis, shunt nephritis, nephropathy of partial lipodystrophy, Fabry's disease, vascular lesions of neurofibromatosis, xanthogranulomatous pyelonephritis, and others. In 1992, she reported the first case of a new immunologically mediated tubulointerstitial and glomerular disease with circulating anti-brush-border antibodies. During the last 20 years, she also studied the pathology of kidney grafts, making original contributions on allograft nephropathy, de novo membranous glomerular nephritis, and recurrence of glomerular diseases, especially focal sclerosis and others. All this research was published in more than 400 articles in main-line journals or textbooks devoted to nephrology. She was a contributing editor to a textbook with P. Royer, H. Mathieu, and M. Broyer on pediatric nephrology, which was first published in 1973, with a further editions in 1983. These publications were translated into Spanish, German, English, and Japanese.

Her important contributions have not gone unnoticed. She was recognized around the world as a distinguished scientist: In 1989, she received from the American Society of Nephrology the John P. Peters Award, which is the highest honor that can be given to a nephrologist. In 1991 she was awarded the International Medal of the National Kidney Foundation. She received the Jean Hamburger award of the ISN in 1997, the Ira Greifer award of the IPNA in 2004, was honored in France by two prizes from the Fondation pour la Recherche Médicale in 1972 and 1978, and the Prix Hamburger de la Société de Néphrologie in 2006. Importantly, and most appreciated, was the award of the Légion d'Honneur presented by the President of the French Republic, François Mitterand, at the Elysée Palace in 1988.

The nephrology community is saddened by Renée Habib death. She is survived by her three children, Marc, Marie

Claire, and Laurent; and her four grandchildren, Jules, Marie, Lise, and Léo. We share their loss and extend to them our friendship, and our admiration to the exceptional woman they loved.

