

Norbert Gschwend Obituary

Norbert Gschwend

Prof. Dr. med.

29.08.1925 - 22.03.2020



On March 22, 2020, in his 95th year, Norbert Gschwend has passed away. He was a visionary orthopaedic surgeon both in strategic aspects and in medical development of our specialty with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, and a charismatic teacher for more than a generation of orthopaedic surgeons. His empathy and his sympathy opened both minds and hearts of his colleagues, students as well as patients. He possessed outstanding lecturing abilities in several languages inspiring co-workers and colleagues in his own institution as well as nationally and abroad, namely in English, French and Italian speaking countries.

In 1962, at the age of 37, he took over the Schulthess Klinik in Zurich, at the time a small and hardly noticed institution with one surgeon-physician and two nurses, few hospital beds, and mostly applying long-term conservative therapeutic measures. Among the patients were many children who had suffered from scoliosis, hip dysplasia and the consequences of poliomyelitis. Within four decades he had formed the Schulthess Klinik to a worldwide recognised orthopaedic institution. The basis of this tremendous success were Norbert Gschwend's personality, his visionary ideas on the future of orthopaedic surgery in a specialised institution. As for the latter he created independent departments of subspecialties, and leading the institution as *primus inter pares*.

Very early on he had realised the potential of operative treatment for patients suffering from rheumatoid arthritis. He created a combined unit integrating rheumatologists and physiotherapy teams following the model of Kauko Vainio in Heinola. Norbert Gschwend's energy to share knowledge stimulated colleagues with the same mind-set (i.e. searching for knowledge), to push Orthopaedics forward for the better of their patients. Collaboration was essential to accomplish this, thus in the early seventies he initiated the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Rheuma-Orthopädie*, today *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rheuma-Orthopädie*. In 1979 he and Jan A. Pahle, S.

Jakubowski, W.A. Souter, H. Brattström, V. Pavlov and K. Tillmann founded the *European Rheumatoid and Arthritis Surgical Society* (ERASS). Norbert Gschwend was also President of ERASS.

Through his open-mindedness and travel, he saw the potential of reconstructive shoulder and elbow surgery in these arthritis patients. Advanced knowledge in this field was present with his French, American friends and other colleagues. He understood that Switzerland and Europe need their own shoulder and elbow society to play a significant role. The friendship with Didier Patte led to the decision to found the European Society for Shoulder and Elbow Surgery (SECEC). At the first congress of SECEC in Paris in 1987 Norbert Gschwend became President and Didier Patte Secretary.

These international recognitions, collaborations in sharing knowledge and experience with colleagues from different continents with different views on topics was exactly what Norbert Gschwend and his founding colleagues from ERASS and SECEC had in mind, since only through knowledge can progress.

His research focused on better performing joint replacements, which was done in a team-approach. The GSB-Group (N. Gschwend, H. Scheier and A. Bähler) developed a number of joint replacements, of which the GSB-prostheses for knee and elbow became popular throughout Europe, starting in the late 70's. Numerous guests and fellows from Europe and the USA visited the Schulthess Klinik and shared their knowledge with Norbert Gschwend and his team. Today the Schulthess Klinik is an important leading orthopaedic institution with worldwide recognition for education and clinical fellowships. The clinic is a founding member of the International Society of Orthopedic Centers (ISOC).

Norbert Gschwend received many honours during his long professional life. He held a large number of honorary keynote lectures throughout the world and was awarded honorary membership of twenty national and international medical societies. In 2000 Norbert Gschwend retired from active clinical work to enjoy more free time within his family. He peacefully passed away on March 22, 2020 at home in the presence of his loved ones.

With Norbert Gschwend we have lost a friend and visionary physician in the true sense of the word with a broad humanistic ethical interest throughout his life.

Beat R. Simmen¹, Daniel Herren², Thomas Pauly², Rob Nelissen³

¹Beat R. Simmen, PD Dr. med.
Former Chairman of Shoulder-, Elbow- and Handsurgery
and Medical Director of the Schulthess Klinik Zurich

²Daniel Herren, MD; Thomas Pauly, MD, board members ERASS

³Prof Rob Nelissen, MD, PhD
President ERASS
Leiden University Medical Center