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Professor Antonios (Anton) Valavanis, MD

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Professor Antonios (Anton) Valavanis, MD

This memorial aims to celebrate the life and the many clinical, educational, and scientific accomplishments of Professor Antonius Valavanis who recently passed away.[1] Antonios Valavanis has impacted and shaped the specialty of diagnostic and interventional neuroradiology like few have done before. He was born in Athens, Greece, graduated from medical school at the University of Zurich, completed his training in radiology and neuroradiology at the University Hospital of Zurich, received his venia legendi in neuroradiology at the University of Zurich, and founded and chaired the Clinic of Neuroradiology at the University Hospital Zurich until his retirement. Together with Professor Peter Huber from Bern, Switzerland, he is considered the father of neuroradiology in Switzerland. His relentless effort to develop neuroradiology as an integral diagnostic and interventional part of the clinical care of patients with neurologic, neurosurgical, or otorhinolaryngeal diseases is legendary.

Antonios Valavanis's curiosity and expertise were stimulated and shaped early in his career by 2 Zurich giants in medicine: Professor M. Gazi Yaşargil and Professor Ugo Fish, who, respectively, served as the Chair of the Department of Neurosurgery and Chair of the Department of Otorhinolaryngology at the University Hospital of Zurich (Fig 1). In the many years of his illustrious career, Antonios Valavanis became a professional and often also close personal friend of many more exceptional physicians around the globe, including companion colleagues like Pierre Lasjaunias (Fig 2), Luc Picard, Giovanni di Chiro, Guido Gugliemi, Marco Leonardi, Alex Berenstein (Fig 3), Scott Atlas, Timo Krings, Karel ter Brugge, and many more. Antonios Valavanis will be especially remembered as an extremely talented innovator, who, on the basis of a detailed knowledge and deep understanding of the functional neuroarchitecture, explored and developed revolutionary neurointerventional approaches to treat patients. He embraced new technologies with ease, always focused on offering the best care possible for patients. Next to his clinical and academic accomplishments, he was also a great representative of all aspects of neuroradiology in Europe and the world. Furthermore, he was an exceptionally gifted teacher, who was able to dissect complex topics in an exemplary way, allowing both junior and senior colleagues to better understand diseases and how to best treat them. In addition, his intelligence, critical thinking, and knowledge of history, combined with a good sense of humor and charisma, made him very well-recognized and successful internationally.

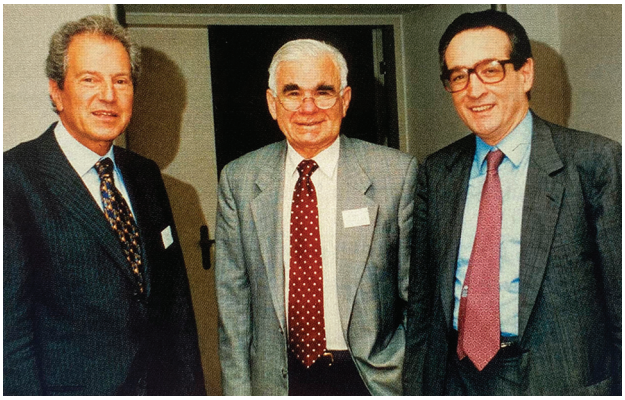

FIG 1. Ugo Fish, M. Gazi Yaşargil, and Antonios Valavanis (1991).

FIG 2. Antonios Valavanis and Pierre Lasjaunias, First International Zurich Course on Interventional Neuroradiology, March 1992.

FIG 3. Alejandro (Alex) Berenstein and Antonios Valavanis, First International Zurich Course on Interventional Neuroradiology, March 1992.

His academic achievements are extensive, including numerous scientific articles, book chapters, books, invited lectures, visiting professorships, scientific awards, honorary memberships, gold medals, and much more. His legacy is, however, best celebrated by the way he is remembered by his colleagues.

M. Gazi Yaşargil

Anton, an outstanding and talented neuroradiologist in endovascular surgery and neurodiagnostics, was a valuable colleague and a loyal friend for more than 40 years. Neuroradiologic diagnosis plays a major role in planning surgical strategy. In Zurich, Anton presided over our daily conference, and with respect, we followed his evaluation of MR and angiographic images and listened attentively to his precise and clear descriptions of the anatomy in relation to the location of the lesion. We miss his quiet presence at our congresses and his exceptional, well-organized lectures, distinguished by the systematic structure of the content.

For me personally, Anton was also a partner for discussion and conversations on a philosophical level. He demonstrated a profound knowledge of Greek philosophers and Greek mythology and a deep understanding of old and new Greek languages. His wisdom was exceptional and supplemented my own readings and great interest in these subjects.

I admired Anton for his placid frame of mind and his dignity and composure throughout a long and distressing illness. His defiance to withstand the frustrations of poor health and negative effects of treatment and to continue his research and publications was impressive.

We recognize his many achievements, and mourn our loss.

Alejandro (Alex) Berenstein

Anton was my dear friend and a very special doctor, scientist, intellectual, colleague, friend, and unique human being.

I miss our interactions so much and his analytical mind, sensitivity, humor, and, most of all, his contagious laughing. The many hours of discussions and then rich consensus advanced our understanding of a topic such as interventional neuroradiology or any topic from science, politics, history (mostly Greek . . .) to human behavior. I will never forget our walk through Zurich's Zoo and how we saw anatomy and evolution as we observed the various animals and how similar and different they were and how they related to everything. We finished with unstoppable laughter as we enjoyed dinner. My beloved friend, what a loss you are to our field, to medicine, to your beautiful family, and personally to me. You will always be my most loved friend.

Scott W. Atlas

My colleague and friend, Professor Anton Valavanis, passed away after a long battle, persevering for years like no one else could have, against all odds. I had the absolute honor of working with Anton beginning in 2013 as Visiting Professor in his world-renowned Neuroradiology Department and to serve as Co-Director of his celebrated course on Interventional Neuroradiology when he added a section on Imaging and Diagnostic Neuroradiology. Everyone who ever worked with him immediately recognized his intellect and unparalleled attention to detail, including his relentless drive to truly understand neurologic diseases at their most basic level—far deeper than the level of knowledge that dominates the field.

Virtually at once, we became close friends and remained so. I also have the great pleasure of knowing his wonderful wife and daughters, in whom he had great pride. Initially, being an American from California, I was stunned at his intimidating and formal presence to his students, who jumped to stand at attention on his entrance. I quickly came to understand and enjoy his humor and warmth over our many memorable dinners and long discussions over fine wine in Zurich. Beyond sharing an intolerance for superficial thinking and appreciating the humor in recognizing the "Emperor's New Clothes" in our field and elsewhere, we shared many great times enjoying what can be best described as a quest for high quality.

Anton Valavanis led a truly remarkable life—a one-of-a-kind man who will never be replaced. I will miss him.

Timo Krings

Having had the unique opportunity to teach with Professor Valavanis in the Zurich Course between 2009 and 2016 allowed me to get to know the many facets of a giant in our field, who truly excelled at whatever he did—whether it was in sports (he competed for the Greek national swimming team), philosophy (in particular his love for the cephalocentric view of Plato and his deepfelt antagonism of the Aristotelian cardiocentrism), neuroanatomy, or catheter handling.

Professor Valavanis was an amazing storyteller, who was able to hold his audience captive, whether he talked about the history of neurointervention, his theories on brain AVM development, or the art of medicine.

However, it was not only serious talking. He had an amazing sense of humor, and his stories about past encounters with luminaries in our fields could easily entertain the faculty of the Zurich Course for an entire evening.

As a neurointerventionalist, he was rooted deeply in neuroanatomy but still embraced new materials and techniques. However, he regarded those as mere tools and was skeptical about those innovations that were mainly driven by companies. His main focus was always the well-being of the patient, and he taught us that the neurointerventional procedure is but one part of the treatment journey of the patient.

He was always sharp, present in the moment, and remained inquisitive and open-minded. He will be missed by his family, his friends and pupils, and his patients.

Karel G. ter Brugge

Anton Valavanis stood out for me not only for being an exceptional interventional neuroradiologist but also because of his outstanding knowledge of neuroanatomy. His ongoing search to understand the phylogenetic evolution of the human brain was unique and revealing. He demonstrated the relevance of such knowledge in the understanding of the neuroimaging characteristics of the various parts of the brain and their relevance for the location of certain pathologies. He taught us the importance of such knowledge because it allowed him to treat his patients safely using tools with which he was thoroughly familiar and rejecting the use of the latest devices with no proved records of superiority.

Anton Valavanis organized, for more than 2 decades, the Zurich Course on Diagnostic and Interventional Neuroradiology, a premier course in its field, attended each year by hundreds of neuroradiologists and neurosurgeons from all over the world. I was fortunate to be part of Zurich Course faculty for many years and witnessed Anton's unique program choices and teaching abilities. It was during the Zurich Course in 2008 that Pierre Lasjaunias, one of Anton's closest friends and a course faculty member since its inception, unexpectantly died. In consultation with Professor Yasargil, former head of neurosurgery at the Zurich University Hospital, Anton decided to continue the program and dedicate it to his friend Pierre Lasjaunias. This choice was made with the understanding that education must continue independent of any given teacher, no matter how outstanding his or her contributions were. The contributions of Anton Valavanis to our field will always be a guidance for future research, education, and patient care.

Finally, How Will I (Thierry Huisman) Remember Professor Antonios Valavanis?

I started 1991 as a fellow in neuroradiology at the University Hospital of Zurich (Fig 4). Training under him was hard but fair. The days of work were long, very long; the evenings and nights as well as the weekends were there for reading and study. A detailed knowledge and understanding of functional neuroanatomy, including embryology, were (and of course still are) a sine qua non. Imaging should always be approached from a clinical perspective, the brain is unique and extremely fascinating, and neuroradiology is one of the best medical specialties there is. Most of all, I learned that critical thinking is very, very important. He advised me to read a text from Eugen Bleuler, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Zurich in the early 1900s. This text was entitled "*Undisciplined Thinking in Medicine and How To Overcome It.*" I integrated this line into my doctorate thesis, which I completed under his supervision/mentorship. This line is today as true as ever. I will always be grateful for all I learned from him. He is one of the true giants in neuroradiology, and because of him, I became a neuroradiologist. I miss him dearly.

FIG 4. Thierry A. Huisman and Antonios Valavanis during the welcome reception of the XIX Annual Scientific Meeting of the European Society of Neuroradiology, September 8–12, 1993.

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