

OBITUARIES

Dr P Astrup

On 1 December 2000, Prof John Severinghaus sent a moving message by e-mail to many of his friends in anaesthesia. At the Hon Editor's request he gave permission for it to be published in the *Proceedings*.

Dear friends,

Elinor and I returned last night from a high altitude research conference in Copenhagen with sad news which we learned as we left our hotel. The distinguished Danish founder of modern acid-base balance, Poul Astrup, died two nights ago, 29 November, after joining Elinor and me and another couple, old friends, at an elegant restaurant in the Copenhagen countryside, Sollerod Kro. We had a very fine dinner and conversation that evening, with no sign of trouble. He suddenly fell dead in his home bathroom about an hour after returning home, presumably ventricular fibrillation. Dr Astrup had had cardiac problems, and several cerebral emboli, and had been resuscitated by CPR and defibrillation almost a year ago, five minutes after arriving on his own at a hospital.

Astrup, and his student Ole Siggaard Andersen, introduced the modern concept of analysis of acid-base balance called base excess, as a quantitative measure, in milliequivalents per litre, of the imbalance in blood, and later, in the body extracellular fluid compartment. He also conceived the then only method for rapid analysis of blood $p\text{CO}_2$ by pH measurement before and after equilibration of the sample with known gas $p\text{CO}_2$ values. I collaborated with Astrup in improving the accuracy of the standard oxygen dissociation curve, the effects on it of pH variation, and the methods of calculating the effects of pH, temperature and affinity (known as P50) on the relationship of $p\text{O}_2$ to saturation. He and I had been friends and collaborators for 41 years since our meeting at a Ciba Symposium on acid-base balance in London in December 1959, published by John Nunn and Ronald Woolmer. Astrup and I wrote several books on the history of acid base balance, my part being only to describe what happened after he became involved in 1951-2 during the Copenhagen polio epidemics. We agreed he would write from the alchemists to Astrup, I taking it from 1950.

Astrup and his wife Bente have 4 children, the eldest, Jens now being Professor and Chairman of Neurosurgery in Aarhus. The Astrups have lived since 1960 on a large and beautiful Danish manor-farm, raising Black Angus cattle, surrounded by a Royal forest, 'Rude Skov'. When our sabbatical in Denmark finished in 1965 our 6 year old son Jeffrey said goodbye to Poul Astrup with the memorable line: 'Thank you for the hay', because for him the most important event was sliding down the hay loft in Astrup's barn. Yours, John and Elinor Severinghaus.

Dr N H Gordon

Dr Nick Gordon of Edinburgh, died in October 2000. He was a Consultant Anaesthetist at the Western General Hospital who became one of the early members of the History of Anaesthesia Society. In 1989, when the Society first met in Edinburgh, he presented a paper (Vol 6a, 7-11) urging greater recognition by anaesthetists of the pioneering work by James Young Simpson, and particularly his masterly responses to the detractors of anaesthesia.