

A dedication to neuroanesthesia, research, and mentorship

V. BONHOMME (*,**,***), C. FRANSSSEN (*), M. LAMY (****)

Key words : Anesthesia ; resuscitation ; professionalism ; education ; intensive care medicine.

Last September 14, 2020, Professor Pol Hans (Figure) passed away after a long disease. We, the authors of this letter, had the privilege of professionally running alongside him for several years, and want here to underline his tremendous contribution to the anesthesia and intensive care specialty, in Belgium and outside Belgium. Professor Hans was not only an excellent clinician, always attentive to the needs and safety of patients, an excellent scientist, but also a rare teacher for youngsters, and a real mentor for a lot of us. In this short synopsis, we would like to retrace his career, his accomplishments, and depict the extraordinary colleague and friend he was. This is the least we can do to honor his memory. We will honestly do this with our own perception of the character, and might therefore miss some elements of his personality. We apologize in advance for any undesirable omission.

Pol Hans was born in 1949. He graduated as a Medical Doctor at the University of Liege in 1975, and was immediately selected by Professor Marcel Hanquet to start a residency in anesthesiology and resuscitation. He obtained his specialist degree in 1979, and rapidly became one of the most faithful and brilliant collaborator of the Department of Anesthesia and Intensive Care Medicine of the Liege University Hospital, first exerting his clinical activity in the 'Baviere' Hospital, thereafter moving to the 'Citadelle' Regional Hospital until his retirement in 2011. He also practiced anesthesiology at the 'André Renard' Clinic, where he was the Head of the Anesthesia and Intensive Care Medicine Department. From the beginning, his main clinical focus of interest was the perioperative and anesthetic management of neurosurgical patients. He was among the pioneers in this domain, and he contributed a lot to its development in Belgium and abroad. His reputation was based on prolific clinical and basic research, which led to a PhD in 1983 and a total of more than 180 papers in national and international peer-reviewed journals, as well as 19 book chapters. His reputation was also



Professor Pol Hans

sustained by his involvement in scientific societies such as the European Society of Anesthesiology, the 'Association de Neuroanesthésie-Réanimation de Langue Française', and the Society for Neuroscience in Anesthesia and Critical Care, and on innumerable invited conferences all over the

Vincent BONHOMME, MD, PhD ; Colette FRANSSSEN, MD, PhD ; Maurice LAMY, MD

(*) Department of Anesthesia and Intensive Care Medicine, University Hospital of Liege, Liege, Belgium

(**) University Department of Anesthesia and Intensive Care Medicine, CHR Citadelle, Liege, Belgium

(***) Anesthesia and Intensive Care Laboratory, GIGA-Consciousness Thematic Unit, GIGA-Research, Liege University, Liege, Belgium

(****) Honorary Professor of Anesthesia and Intensive Care Medicine and Retired Head of the Department of Anesthesia and Intensive Care Medicine, University Hospital of Liege and Liege University, Liege, Belgium

Corresponding author : Vincent Bonhomme, University Department of Anesthesia and Intensive Care Medicine, Bd du 12eme de Ligne, 1, 4000 Liege, Belgium.

Email : vincent.bonhomme@chuliege.be

world. Many consider him as a master of clinical research. As a clinician, he demonstrated a lot of rigor, exigence, and skillfulness, while not being any tyrant for those around him. Aside from his clinical and scientific activities, he was strongly involved in the teaching of anesthesiology and received the title of Clinical Professor from the Medicine Faculty of the University of Liege in 1997.

A characteristic of Pol Hans, on which everyone agrees, was his continuous commitment to teach anesthesia and resuscitation to trainees in anesthesiology, and his devotion to bring younger colleagues' career up by showing them how to undertake research and guiding them through the assault course of a PhD thesis. Many residents were often disputing the opportunity to spend a year with him, to benefit from his patience, kindness, knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm. He used to strengthen his teaching messages by unforgettable sentences such as: 'A good anesthesiologist is an aware individual beside a sleeping patient, and not the inverse', to underline the need for continuous vigilance of the anesthesiologist towards his/her patient welfare and safety. He was aiming at learning to residents not only to DO anesthesia, but more importantly to BE anesthesiologists in the best sense of the word, namely worried of patients entrusted to him/her. When a trainee had problems, he used to take him/her under his wing, and find a solution to overcome excessive stress, knowledge deficits, lack of confidence, social relationship difficulties, or personal problems. Mentorship was

natural for him, through a healthy collaboration with colleagues, sharing of ideas, passionate discussions on several topics, and thoughtful guidance. He used to say that good research begins with asking oneself the good question, as simple as possible, and then think how it could be answered by designing the adequate experiment. He was an expert in reviewing texts and dissertations, kneading sentences until finding the perfect formulation. One of the most gratifying professional accomplishment for him was the acceptance of a good paper in a highly cited journal, whatever his place in the authors' list. We feel that every single anesthesiologist should have the chance to cross the road of such an exceptional mentor during the course of his/her career.

With a deadpan sense of humor, Pol Hans was maintaining a pleasant ambiance around him. He had strong rigor in work and a propensity to hardly afford hazardous organization, but stress never rubbed off around him. In line with his and his wife Danielle hospitableness, he had a liking for good wines, and was appreciating to share them with friends and colleagues. With Danielle, he was also strongly involved in social and humanitarian good deeds, such as the 'Médecins sans vacances' and 'Famille sans frontières' organizations. Not running after undeserved titles and honors was another trait of his personality.

With the departure of Pol Hans, the Belgian anesthesiology community has lost a figure, and we have to pay him a glowing tribute. He will remain an example for many of us.