Anders Langenskiöld

1916–2000

Anders Langenskiöld, Professor Emeritus of Orthopaedics and Traumatology at the University of Helsinki, died July 8, 2000 at the age of 84 years. Although his physical condition was slowly weakening during his last 2 years, he retained his brilliant mind until the end of his life.

Anders Langenskiöld was born in Helsinki, Finland, in 1916 and graduated with a degree in medicine from the University of Helsinki in 1943. Before that, Langenskiöld wrote his doctoral thesis on electrophysiology under the guidance of the Nobel prize winner, Ragnar Granit. Studies of histopathology in Switzerland later gained importance for his future work. Many years of cooperation with the famous bone pathologist, Erwin Uehlinger, Professor of Pathology at the University of Zürich, stood him in good stead. He intented to continue his career in physiology, but work in field hospitals during Finland's war against the Soviet Union from 1941 to 1944 brought him to surgery. He had received his training in surgery and orthopedics at Helsinki University Hospital and at the Orthopaedic Hospital of the Invalid Foundation, but worked as a general surgeon until 1956 although he was interested in studying and treating of diseases of the musculoskeletal system.

Anders Langenskiöld was the Medical Director and Chief Surgeon of the Orthopaedic Hospital of the Invalid Foundation in Helsinki from 1956 to 1968. He founded the Research Laboratory of the Invalid Foundation, the present ORTON Research Institute, in 1956, where he did most of his scientific work. During this time, he made many important contributions to orthopedic science. His work on experimental scoliosis, reconstructive surgery in poliomyelitis, coxa plana and coxa vara infantum, bone transplantation, tibia vara and many other conditions during growth and adolescence are well-known all over the world. He had numerous residents who presented their dissertations, either experimental or clinical, under his guidance. He did not accept "experimental surgery on human beings" and insisted that every surgical procedure should have a firm experimental basis. "We need not operate on one thousand patients to prove that the method is not good", he said. He developed the method for preventing epidural scar formation in spinal surgery and anterolateral decompression in the treatment of spinal cord compression. His main interest, however, was skeletal growth and orthopedic problems in children. He accepted early the theory of interstitial latitudinal growth of the growth plate and did much experimental and clinical work to prove the validity of this theory. This also helped him to suggest removal of partial closure of the growth plate with fat graft interposition, the operation we now call the "Langenskiöld procedure". During this time the Orthopaedic Hospital of the Invalid Foundation became a famous orthopedic center and well-known all over the world.

In 1968, he was appointed Professor of Orthopaedics and Traumatology at the University of Helsinki, and became Head of this Department from 1969 to 1979, and consulting surgeon at the Orthopaedic Hospital of the Invalid Foundation.

This was a very busy time in his life because of teaching, research work, invited lectureships all over the world and many national and international activities associated with orthopedic surgery and traumatology. He was an Honorary Member of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, the Scandinavian Orthopaedic Association, the Scandinavian Society for Rehabilitation and Honorary Fellow of the British Orthopaedic Association and the Royal College of Surgeons in England. He was also a Member of the Editorial Board in many journals.

In 1991, he closed his private practice, but continued being active in experimental research. Langenskiöld has played an important role in the development of orthopedic surgery and traumatology in Finland, and today most orthopedic centers in this country are headed by his disciples. Thus, the knowledge and experience of the Langenskiöld School have spread all over the country for the benefit of patients needing orthopedic surgical treatment.

During holidays, Anders loved to spend his time at his summer home in the Finnish archipelago practising long-distance sailing and windsurfing. Downhill skiing was also a hobby and it was great to enjoy his company having intelligent discussions, often with a good meal. Anders will be deeply missed by his beloved wife, Kristina, and 3 adult children with their families. His colleagues feel that we have lost a great teacher and friend and the orthopedic world has lost one of its great representatives of our time.

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