

Kauko Juhani Vainio

1913-1989



After a long illness, Professor Kauko Vainio, former Director of Orthopedic Services at the Rheumatism Foundation Hospital in Heinola, died on January 17, 1989, in the hospital that he had served for so long.

Kauko Juhani Vainio was born on May 1, 1913, in Sääminki, Eastern Finland. Upon graduating from medical school in 1939, he was immediately drafted for war service as a physician. Following training at the Departments of Surgery and Orthopedics at the University Central Hospitals of Oulu, Helsinki, and Turku, he was certified as a specialist in surgery and orthopedics in 1951. Upon his return from a year of study in the United States in 1952, he was appointed Director of Orthopedics at the Rheumatism Foundation Hospital, where he remained until his retirement in 1975. He was appointed associate professor in 1956 and professor in 1970.

The most prominent part of Kauko Vainio's life work was undoubtedly at the Rheumatism Foundation Hospital, where he closely cooperated with Professor Veikko Laine, the internist. The two specialists developed a holistic team approach to the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. At the time, however, the orthopedic treatment of this condition was an entirely new concept, and the two pioneers met with fierce resistance. Strong willed, the two-man team eventually turned a humble beginning into outstanding achievements that benefitted many severely handicapped patients.

Orthopedic treatment yielded positive results from the very beginning, and as early as the 1950s, the team's findings published at international meetings and in scientific journals received widespread attention and respect. Assiduous research and the development of new therapeutic methods put Heinola on the world map as the Mecca of treatment, notably surgery, for rheumatic diseases. Kauko Vainio became known

as the father of systematic rheuma-orthopedics, and he attracted almost a thousand specialists in rheumatology to Heinola from all parts of the world. His reputation as an inspiring teacher quickly spread and won him popularity on all continents. Gifted in languages, he always tried, as far as possible, to lecture and communicate in the local tongue.

Kauko Vainio participated enthusiastically in specialist organizations in both Finland and abroad. He was President of the Finnish Orthopedic Society from 1961 to 1973, and was awarded honorary memberships in 11 surgical, rheuma-orthopedic, and hand-surgery societies, and in the rheumatological societies of seven countries. He received the Finnish Matti Äyräpää medical award in 1970 for his achievements.

Kauko Vainio's proficiency was not limited to medicine only; he was a keen student of birds, plants, and particularly mushrooms; and he endeavored to grow various mushrooms in his garden. When travelling, he always took time to find out about the local environment, and he enlivened his travel reports with beautiful photographs and expert descriptions. Even after his retirement, he continued to cherish long-term patient contacts. He was particularly active in keeping abreast with the literature, remaining in touch right up until his death.

The robust figure of Kauko Vainio is gone. Finnish medicine has lost one of its best known physicians, patients a skilled and popular doctor, and future generations of doctors an inspiring and resourceful teacher.

– *Martti Hämäläinen*
 Director of Orthopedics
 The Rheumatism Foundation Hospital
 Heinola, Finland

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