

OBITUARY

Dick L. Leiker, M.D., Ph.D.

28 November 1919–11 January 1995



During the night of 11 January 1995 Dick Leiker passed away at the age of 75. In command, as usual, he decided that treatment of the complications of his vascular disease should be discontinued.

Dick was born on 28 November 1919 in Buitenpost, The Netherlands. He graduated from the medical faculty of Groningen University in 1948. From 1949 to 1958 he worked as a government physician responsible for leprosy control in the former Netherlands New Guinea. On departure from New Guinea he suffered a most tragic catastrophe: the plane crashed and he lost his wife and their four children. All scientific data, so meticulously collected and researched during the previous years, were lost in the same crash. Dick never flew again.

After a long period of recovery he specialized as a dermatologist from 1958 to 1961 at the Erasmus University Hospital in Rotterdam. Then he served as a leprosy consultant in Northern Nigeria until he joined the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) in Amsterdam in 1965. He was also part-time consultant leprologist at the dermatological clinics of the University of Amsterdam (from 1968) and the Erasmus University of Rotterdam (from 1970). He retired from the KIT in 1982, but remained as a medical adviser to the Netherlands Leprosy Relief Association (NSL) and as a visiting professor in tropical dermatology and leprosy at the University of Genoa, Italy. He was a member of several committees including the WHO Expert Advisory Panel and the Medical Commission of the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP). He was a contributing editor to the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEPROSY.

Dick Leiker was a man of vision. He was a gifted teacher and had a strong interest in research. He contributed to the development and introduction of multidrug therapy. He published about 100 scientific articles covering virtually all aspects of leprology, including immunology, histopathology, epidemiology and public health. He contributed to several books as an author or editor. Because of his scientific merits, the University of Amsterdam awarded him an honorary doctorate in 1981 and he became a Knight of the Order of Orange Nassau. He received the Albert Schweitzer Prize, the Eykman Medal, the Mendes da Costa Medal and the NSL Award. He was an honorary member of the International Leprosy Association (ILA).

With the death of Dick Leiker, the Netherlands leprosy community has lost their nestor. He stood at the basis of the leprosy activities of the Royal Tropical Institute and was the co-founder of NSL. With his enthusiasm and dedication, sometimes close to obsession, he motivated many young Dutch doctors to join the fight against leprosy. Numerous doctors out of Leiker's "stables" have served in leprosy control programs in developing countries, and several of them have made lasting professional careers in antileprosy work.

It was a privilege to have Dick as our teacher. Even after his retirement he remained our profoundly respected mentor.

We express our deep sympathy to his wife, who lovingly cared for him, devoting all of her strength during the long and arduous period before he passed away. We extend our sincere condolences to her and Dick's children.

—William Faber
Pieter Feenstra
Paul Klatser
Ben Naafs