

OBITUARIES

Oliver W. Hasselblad, M.D.

1909–1997



Oliver W. Hasselblad, M.D., former president of American Leprosy Missions (ALM) and champion of people affected by Hansen's disease, was born in South Dakota, U.S.A., and died at the age of

88 on 3 May 1997 at his home in Redlands, California.

Before coming to American Leprosy Missions Dr. Hasselblad was a medical missionary in Assam, India, from 1938 to 1957 at the American Baptist Hospital in Jorhat. When Dr. and Mrs. Hasselblad took over the medical work at Jorhat in 1938 it was a small institution of 25 beds. When he left India in 1957 it was a large thriving community with a general hospital of 225 beds, including a tuberculosis hospital, a greatly enlarged leprosy settlement and two outlying medical units in the Naga hills. The expansion had been largely made possible by Dr. Hasselblad's own earnings as a physician to the large tea plantations in that area. During his time in India, Dr. Hasselblad was awarded the Kaisar-I-Hind distinction by the government of the day for his outstanding service. Dr. Hasselblad was appointed president of American Leprosy Missions in 1959. He quickly became a tireless advocate of integration and rehabilitation.

Basing his philosophy on the biblical concept of justice [Psalm 82:3], in many ways he was ahead of his time. When he came to ALM, the majority of patients were still treated in segregated institutions, and medical people believed that disability in leprosy was an inevitable concomitant of the disease and that rehabilitation of patients was not a practical possibility. Dr. Hasselblad's advocacy of integration of lep-

rosy care into the basic health services and rehabilitation for people with disabilities due to leprosy often led him into conflict. He was always forthright and open in expounding his views. In many instances time proved him to be right. An editorial he wrote for this journal [Vol. 35, no. 1, 1967] is typical. "We are not applying what we know," he wrote, and in the same editorial he deplored the failure to carry out "sufficient or authoritative scientific investigations of . . . many other problems having to do with social attitudes" toward leprosy. During his presidency ALM became heavily involved in training. It was he who initiated the ALM U.S. Public Health Service seminars at Carville, Louisiana, which began in 1960 and continued until the early 1990s. He made strenuous efforts to have leprosy recognized in the international rehabilitation arena, initially against great opposition because of the fear of leprosy as an infectious disease. He traveled widely for American Leprosy Missions making nearly 40 trips during the years 1958 to 1964 alone, and was widely used as a consultant by the Pan American Health Organization, the American Medical Association, USAID and the Christian Medical Commission. He was instrumental in the establishment of ALERT, was heavily involved in the development of the training centers at Karigiri, India, and Laura de Souza Lima in Brazil. It was also during his presidency that ALM accepted the responsibility for the business office of this journal.

Oliver Hasselblad was always on the lookout for young professionals who were interested in leprosy and became a mentor and an encourager to many, some of whom are still active in leprosy almost 25 years after he retired.

During most of his college years and also during his medical training, Dr. Hasselblad was pastor of a Baptist church in Omaha,

Nebraska, and it was no doubt his pastor's heart which led him into missions and ultimately to leprosy.

In one of his last public statements as ALM president at the 1974 Leprosy Mission Centennial in London, Dr. Hasselblad had the following comments to make:

Commissioning those whom He (Jesus the Christ) had trained, one is reminded of basic principles used today in training and sending out paramedical workers; to reach into every village area of our responsibility, to heal the patient where he lives: 'Take nothing for the journey—neither stick nor pack neither bread nor money, nor are each to have a second coat.' Travel light! Keep it simple! In Christian leprosy work at its best, I have seen doctor, nurse, or paramedical worker moving out from the secure safe ground of an institution, using methods as simple as our Lord taught. And when this is consistently and systematically done, it is Christian leprosy work claim-

ing our Lord's promises. What wonderful opportunities for such Christian workers to effectively 'proclaim the Kingdom of God' in the intimate surroundings of the patient's home and community, and to secure the assistance of Christian leaders and pastors in the area to build bridges of love and helpfulness to the patient.

Following his retirement from American Leprosy Missions in 1974, he continued working, first in the National Health Service in Jamaica and later on the island of Molokai in Hawaii.

He is survived by his wife, Norma; by his son, Carl, who is serving in Cambodia with USAID's Maternal and Child Health program; by daughters Marva Harle, at the Presbyterian Mission Hospital in Tshikaji in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Wyva Hasselblad, with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee in Senegal; and by six grandchildren.

—W. Felton Ross, M.B.B.S.

Olaf K. Skinsnes 1917–1997

Olaf Skinsnes was born 20 April 1917 in Henan, central China, the son of a Norwegian-American missionary surgeon. He received his primary and secondary education in a mission school, the American school in Kikungshan, China, and then came to St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, U.S.A., where he earned his bachelor's degree. He then attended the University of Chicago where he earned both an M.D. and Ph.D. In 1949 he arrived in Hong Kong on his way to a teaching position in pathology which had been arranged at a medical school in China. Due to the political changes occurring in China at that time, it was not possible for him to proceed. Instead he took a position at the University of Hong Kong.

At the University of Hong Kong he began his research on the pathology and immunology of leprosy, a study which lasted for the rest of his life. While there he became a co-founder of the Hay Ling Chau

leprosarium. After 10 years in Hong Kong he returned to the University of Chicago for 8 years. Then he became one of the founding faculty members of the John A. Burns School of Medicine at the University of Hawaii. Upon his retirement from the University of Hawaii in 1985, he was invited to return to the country of his birth by Dr. Ma Haide. He accepted a faculty appointment in the Department of Pathology at Sun Yat Sen University of Medical Sciences, where he also served as an advisor on leprosy control and research and assisted in the publication of the *China Leprosy Journal*. In 1988 he suffered the first of a series of strokes which gradually took their toll and eventually forced his return to the United States, where he died on 21 December 1997.

Dr. Skinsnes had a long and distinguished career as a teacher. He brought this spirit of a teacher to the editorship of this Journal from 1968 until 1978. He con-



Dr. Skinsnes and Guo Hua Zhao, his last graduate student, who is now a post-doctoral fellow at Stanford University.

stantly worked with authors to improve their work and to encourage further work and further thinking. For decades his research remained at the forefront of our knowledge about leprosy. His landmark explanation of the immunology of leprosy (Skinsnes, O. K. The immunological spectrum of leprosy. In: *Leprosy in Theory and Practice*, R. G. Cochrane and T. F. Davey, eds. Baltimore: The Williams & Wilkins Co., 1964, pp. 156–182.) correctly predicted the fundamental concepts of the disease's immunology years before their experimental verification and years before there were even the basic concepts of "modern immunology." These observations came from a brilliant, analytical mind with an extraordinary ability to keenly observe

and formulate unifying concepts. These are the attributes of a great teacher, and Dr. Skinsnes was exactly that, a great teacher. Our deepest sympathies go out to his wife and children at their loss. Our sympathies go out to all leprosy workers who have lost one of the truly great minds and truly great hearts to ever work in our cause.

The feeling cannot be expressed more appropriately than Dr. Skinsnes did on these pages in reference to Dr. Esmond Long in 1968 (IJL 36:450, 1968) which I repeated to him when I became editor of this Journal in 1979 (IJL 47:60, 1979): "As a Chinese saying has it, 'He who is for one day my teacher, is my father for life.'"

—RCH