

# Remembering Dieter Hager

Sunday, 10 January 2010

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On Friday, January 15, I will deliver a eulogy at the memorial service in Bad Bergzabern for my dear friend and colleague, Erich Dieter Hager, MD, PhD. Dieter, who passed away at the Biomed Hospital on December 13, 2009. January 15 would have been his 63rd birthday. Other speakers will include Harald Brat, the mayor of the town and Kurt Beck, governor of the German state of Rheinland-Pfalz, Friedrich Migeod, MD, chief doctor of the Biomed Hospital and György Irmey, MD, of the Society for Biological Defense Against Cancer (GFBK) in Heidelberg.

Dieter Hager was a foundational figure in the field of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). In the 1970s he studied physics at the University of Stuttgart and biology at the Max-Planck-Institute for Molecular Genetics in Berlin. These studies gave him a solid grounding for his later approach to cancer, particularly hyperthermia. In 1980 received his medical degree from the University of Göttingen, one of the best universities in Germany. During this period he studied at Oxford University. In 1994, he also received a naturopathic medical degree as well.

In the 1980s, Dieter became medical and scientific director of Cytobiological Laboratories, Heidelberg, where he directed research in peptides, tissue engineering and cell therapy. His first foray into private practice came in 1987-1988 when he became chief physician at a cancer rehabilitation hospital, the Klinik Friedenweiler, in Germany's famous Black Forest. I once accompanied him on a visit to Friedenweiler, but to be honest all I remember from that visit was Dieter taking the hairpin turns with breathtaking speed.

In 1989, Dieter became executive medical director of the BioMed-Klinik, Hospital for Integrative Cancer Therapy in Bad Bergzabern, Germany. This became his home town and he was very proud of its beauty and ambiance. It was my pleasure to visit him there frequently, often to speak at scientific meetings, most recently for the clinic's 20th anniversary celebrations in September 2009.

In 2004, Dieter became an adjunct professor at the University of Applied Sciences in Esslingen. Dieter was a universally respected leader in the field of complementary medicine. In 1981, he helped found the German Society of Oncology (the "DGO"), of which I am an honorary member. In 1982 he co-founded the Society for Biological Cancer Therapy. In 1987, he became editor of the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Onkologie* (the German Cancer Journal).

No one did more to establish the use of hyperthermia as a scientific treatment. For 18 years he served as an official of the International Clinical Hyperthermia Society (ICHHS) and was also a founding member and officer of the German Society for Hyperthermia.

Dieter was also one of the first German CAM doctors to participate in meetings of the American Society for Clinical Oncology. With his Biomed colleagues, he made important contributions to ASCO meetings from 2000 to 2008. It was our yearly ritual to get together at these meetings. I enjoyed these times very much, as I had the chance to explore New Orleans, Atlanta, Chicago, and other cities with him, seeing my own country anew through his eyes. Some of his most important contributions were presented at these ASCO meetings. In 2008 he presented a paper on the use of capacitive coupled low radiofrequency (LRF) hyperthermia in the treatment of high-grade gliomas (*J Clin Oncol* 26: 2008 (May 20 suppl; abstr 2047)). Dieter and Friedrich Migeod presented this work to great acclaim at the CancerGuides meeting in Washington, DC just this past June.

Dieter's scientific contributions were many. He pioneered the use of lithium carbonate in treating the blood deficiencies (thrombocytopenia and leucopenia) arising from the use of chemotherapy (Hager 2001a and Hager 2002). He was pioneered the use of intraperitoneal heated chemotherapy infusions in the treatment of ovarian and other peritoneal cancer (Hager 2001b). He showed that deep hyperthermia could be used for patients with liver metastases from colorectal cancer (Hager 1999).

His care as a physician and his dedication to science was extraordinary. Just weeks before his death he was made a presentation of results at the German Society of Oncology meeting, where he received a five minute standing ovation. I will miss Dieter both as a dear friend and as a colleague. I know that others, at Biomed and elsewhere, will continue to give the treatments that he innovated. But, to quote Shakespeare,

"He was a man, take him for all in all,  
I shall not look upon his like again."

--Ralph W. Moss, Ph.D.

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