



## In memoriam Prof. Dr. med. Wolfgang Steiner (1942–2024)

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Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Steiner, Director of the Department of Otorhinolaryngology of the University of Goettingen, Germany, from 1986 to 2007, died on February 5th, 2024. We are losing a globally esteemed colleague who significantly influenced progress and developments in head and neck oncology for many years.

Wolfgang Steiner was born on March 2nd, 1942 in Crailsheim. He studied medicine at the Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. From 1971 to 1975, he trained as an ENT surgeon at the Department of Ear, Nose and Throat Diseases at the University of Erlangen, which was headed by Professor Malte Erik Wigand. He became a faculty member in 1979 with a thesis on the diagnosis of laryngeal carcinoma. In 1986, he was appointed Professor and Chairman of the Department of Otorhinolaryngology at Goettingen University, a position he held until September 2007.

His scientific interest focused on clinical oncology. At the beginning of his career, he was committed to the introduction of rigid and flexible endoscopy as standard examination technique in clinical practice. In the mid-1970s, he and his team carried out several mass screening examinations for the early detection of carcinomas of the oral cavity, pharynx and larynx on several thousand persons. He was awarded the Hufeland Prize for his pioneering work in the field of secondary prevention of head and neck cancer in 1984.

As a young consultant, he began using the new laser technology for laryngeal surgery in 1978. He developed the surgical technique, initially operating on benign proliferations and early carcinomas of the vocal folds and used the laser to restore the airway in palliative surgery. Good surgical results with early vocal fold carcinomas prompted him to extend the surgical indication to larger tumours and to the other organs of the upper aerodigestive tract. Initially, there

was considerable resistance to transoral, i.e. endoscopic surgery of malignant tumours with curative intent in his own and foreign scientific societies. Wolfgang Steiner loved to passionately discuss his ideas with opponents and convince them to follow his arguments. At the time of development, his concept of a personalized therapy tailored to the individual patient, consisting of minimally invasive, organ- and function-preserving surgery and risk-adapted radiotherapy, was innovative and ahead of its time. Wolfgang Steiner was always grateful to his director, Professor M. E. Wigand, for supporting his concept in the early years.

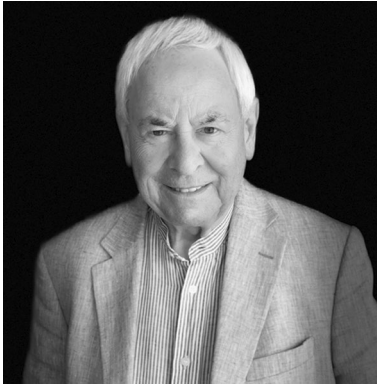
After several years of controversial discussions, he was awarded the Professor Dr. Ludwig Haymann Prize of the German Society of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery for his progress in the field of transoral laser microsurgery of malignant tumours in 1997. He has presented the concept, surgical technique and treatment results of laser surgery in numerous lectures, publications and surgical courses in Goettingen and abroad. He has received great interest and high professional and personal recognition at home and around the world. He has been honoured to deliver a number of the most renowned lectures, to name just the most important: the Daniel C. Baker Lecture of the American Laryngological Association, the Chevalier Jackson Lecture of the American Broncho-Esophagological Association, the Eugene N. Myers International Lecture in Head and Neck Cancer of the American Academy of ORL-HNS and the Felix Semon Lecture of the Royal College of Medicine, London.

It is no surprise that he has been honoured with a number of important scientific awards. He was the first ENT surgeon to receive the German Cancer Prize in 2005. He was awarded the Ludwig Tuerck Medal from the Austrian and the Przemyslaw Pieniazek Medal from the Polish ENT Society. However, he was particularly pleased to receive the highest honours of the two medical faculties of which he was a member: he was awarded the Dr. Fritz Erler Science Prize of the Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg and the Albrecht von Haller Medal of the Georg August University of Goettingen.

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He served as President of the German Society of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery (1997/1998) and the German Society of Endoscopy and Imaging Techniques (2000/2001). His merits were recognized with numerous honorary memberships of the German and international scientific societies as well as the honorary fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.



Prof. Dr. med. Wolfgang Steiner in 2022 (courtesy: Grazia Steiner)

In his later years, Professor Steiner was an authority in head and neck oncology. He was an outstanding scientist, a fearless pioneer of innovative concepts, an empathic physician, a great leader and colleague and a family man. He is survived by his wife Grazia, to whom he had been married since 1966 and who always supported him, three sons and five grandchildren. He will be remembered by all who knew him.

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