Trends in Hepatology
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A Symposium in Honour of Dr. Dr. Herbert Falk on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday

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Preface

This volume comprises a series of original articles, updates and reviews on relevant topics in hepatology which were presented at a meeting in Freiburg im Breisgau to honour the 60th anniversary of Dr. Herbert Falk. Since 1967, Dr. Falk and the Falk Foundation have generously sponsored more than 40 congresses and symposia on liver diseases, held mostly in Freiburg, The Black Forest or in Basel, which have become milestones in the exchange of scientific information in hepatology (see ‘To Herbert Falk on his Sixtieth Birthday’ in this volume). Many of these congresses and symposia have been published in the ‘Falk Symposia’ series by MTP Press.

We asked hepatologists who took part in former Falk liver meetings to contribute to a one day symposium to celebrate Dr. Falk’s anniversary. We were greatly gladdened by the spontaneous and unrestrained acceptance that we received from all sides. We wish to express our deep appreciation to all the speakers and moderators who travelled, at their own expense, from all parts of the world to Freiburg and who with their presentations, made the meeting a stimulating and refreshing event. The editors’ thanks are also addressed to Mr. D. G. T. Bloomer and Mr. P. M. Lister from MTP Press for their valuable cooperation in preparing this volume for publication. This book testifies to the worldwide appreciation and gratitude held for Dr. Falk by the community of hepatologists.

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Dr. Dr. Herbert Falk
To pay tribute to an unusual person on his sixtieth birthday is a challenge. It is even more so if he is a member of the biomedical community who has distinguished himself by his deeds and actions rather than by his own scientific discoveries and writings. A tribute to this jubilarian is particularly interesting because it illuminates the infrastructure of biomedical sciences, which is less obvious and less frequently described, but essential to the performance of all three aspects — medical research, teaching and patient care.

Tributes to people who have contributed to medical knowledge and practice essentially serve three purposes. The first is to give credit to the individual and at the same time thank them for their contributions. The second is to describe her/him as an example, and thus to inspire others. And the third is an exercise in the sociology of biomedical science, because it illuminates the inner workings of the scientific enterprise. This tribute deals with both the personality responsible for these activities and particularly for their progress, and the motivation which fashioned the currents in the biomedical sciences, including the importance of business activities. Regardless of the personal data and achievements in such a tribute, the information presented should be a valuable source to enable the sociologist to trace the development of biomedicine or one of its branches and thus improve its conduct.

Thus, a tribute for a good friend, Dr Herbert Falk of Freiburg, Germany, is written not only to wish him well on his birthday and to thank him, but also to explore his societal role, especially important and instructive because of his various activities. They are varied because, with a background of thorough education and training in biomedicine, he is essentially founder, owner and director (Geschaeftsfoehrer) of a pharmaceutical company, is also a publisher of medical literature, both directly and indirectly, and an organizer par excellence of medical meetings of different types. Having known him for about 19 years I still don’t know to which of these three endeavours he devotes most of his time and most of his efforts. These three
activities are interwoven, particularly since the conduct of his pharmaceutical business provides the funds necessary for the other two. Herbert Falk will be the last to deny that the other two activities, medical publishing and the organization of meetings, favour his pharmaceutical business by providing advance information capable of being applied to the development of drugs, by bringing him into contact with experts, and last, but not least, by bringing prestige to his drug manufacturing house. Like many other, usually much larger and presumably richer drug companies, the non-commercial activities are guided by an independent foundation, and any advertising of drugs is carefully avoided, at least at the major meetings and in books and serial publications brought out by the foundation. Both lack of concern and also of knowledge prevent me from dealing any further with Falk’s drug house. Successful as it apparently is, it is dwarfed, in the minds of his friends, by the unique accomplishments of the Falk Foundation for which the drug house seems to provide quite impressive financial support.

The role of Dr. Falk and his foundation is best appreciated by the emphasis placed on medical communication, and by considering the status of hepatology as a discipline at a time when his influence became noticeable in this field. It is usually said that before World War II the biology of the liver was of foremost interest in the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic countries, with various Latin countries placing the emphasis on the clinical symptomatology of liver diseases; while in what we now call the ‘developing countries’ liver diseases, particularly hepatocellular cancer with or without cirrhosis, and parasitic diseases, especially schistosomiasis, were serious public health problems causing morbidity and mortality in many people during their most productive years. The word ‘hepatology’ was mainly used, if at all, in Latin languages. After World War II the improvement of global communications led to a merging of interest and ideas in various parts of the world. This was reflected in the formation of national and international associations for the study of the liver, which are greatly credited with the development of hepatology as a defined discipline. The result of this endeavour was the widespread application of biology of the liver at the bedside, this markedly improved the management of those patients with liver disease. More recently, a series of disciplines previously barely applied to liver disease have become important, such as epidemiology, immunology and toxicology. Most recently, molecular biology has come to the foreground. The result of all these trends has been the acceptance of the term ‘hepatology’ in every language. Communication in verbal and written form became the mainstay in the creation of hepatology as an independent discipline.

In the area of communication the activities of Herbert Falk and his Foundation are original, indeed most innovative, and barely matched by any other person or organization. The emphasis on this uniqueness is the key message of this tribute.

To first describe the meetings Herbert Falk organizes, there are regional postgraduate symposia (Fortbildungsveranstaltungen) dealing with all aspects of hepatology and gastroenterology. Authorities, mainly from Germany but also from Austria and Switzerland, are invited as speakers. The increasing popularity of the meetings is reflected in that from 1974 to 1981
their yearly number had risen from 9 to 90, and of total participants, from less than 1000 to more than 10,000 per year. These 'Veranstaltungen', mostly attended by physicians in private practice, serve to bring recent information and particularly new diagnostic and therapeutic procedures of increasing complexity to the attention of the physicians, both specialists and generalists. The quality of the presentations in the past has been most effective in persuading physicians to remain lifelong students. These seminars organized by the Falk Foundation have been most successful particularly in Germany, but recently in other parts of the world, where they are usually scheduled at times of international meetings when experts are available. However, they are in intent and principle no different from those organized by medical schools, research institutes, medical societies, foundations and pharmaceutical houses.

Such a similarity does not hold true for a second type of Falk Foundation meeting – triennial gatherings which started in Freiburg in 1967 with an attendance which could be accommodated in the amphitheatre of the medical clinic. They continued 3 and 6 years later in the Aula Maxima in Freiburg. Subsequently they had, however, to be moved to facilities only available at the Mustermesse, Basel. They thus became known as the world-famous Basel Liver Week. These large assemblies, attended by more than 2000 participants, many accompanied by family or friends, have become the grand international gatherings of hepatology. The recent addition of poster sessions has not only increased the number of presentations, but also the opportunity for informal scientific exchange, frequently by people coming from different continents and also from different disciplines. The success and the considerable international participation from almost every country in the world results in the quality and variety of the presentations.

The main symposium is devoted to a major current topic in hepatology, which is discussed by world authorities in the specific field. Simultaneous translation into four languages is available. The characteristic of the presentations is the combination of review of the state of the art with frequently new unpublished observations. Part of the triennial meeting is also the award of the Eppinger Prize donated by the Falk Foundation for the outstanding contribution to hepatology. It has been distributed five times to renowned authorities, and has been called the 'Nobel Prize of Hepatology'. This was also justified by the subsequent award of the Nobel Prize to Baruch Blumberg following his receipt of the Eppinger Prize. More recently, a Hans Popper Prize is given to a scientist under 35 years of age from a German speaking country.

While the major meeting is attended both by physicians in general and specialized practice as well as by academic physicians, the participants of the accompanying meetings, held in English, are probably mostly academic physicians and biologic scientists (Naturwissenschaftler). One type of these associated meetings, which have been held four times so far, always deals with a basic science subject which is in the process of making an impact on hepatology, although most of the practising hepatologists have not yet been acquainted with this subject in any depth. These meetings, also of several
days duration, bring together, as speakers, basic scientists who have usually not before been concerned with hepatic problems, with some hepatologists doing research in the specific area. The purpose is less the presentation of newly discovered information, but rather, mutual stimulation, often carried over successfully from research in other organ and cell systems. The result has been that basic scientists have learned to use the liver as a model for their studies, and the hepatologists are employing, on the liver, concepts and methods which had previously been used in other systems. The increase in the number of participants through the years, last time exceeding 500, bespeaks the success of these high specialized meetings. Furthermore, the Falk Foundation organizes biennial meetings dealing with bile acid metabolism in health and disease. The 7th International Bile Acid Meeting was held at the Basel Liver Week in 1982 with more than 1000 people in attendance, and an Adolf Windaus Prize was given for the first time. Finally, the Basel Liver Week in 1982 again concluded with a Seminar on Histopathological Alterations in the Liver, where 700 participants listened to the histologic and clinical discussion of the individual problems of liver patients.

All these varied one-week-long stimulating activities carry the impact of Herbert Falk’s genius of organization, both scientifically and technically. Although obviously speakers are selected and invited by the scientific organizers in cooperation with the president of each symposium, all of them feel the spirit and enthusiasm of Herbert and are aware that their selection is made possible by the generosity of the Foundation. Although the Liver Week consists of a series of different symposia, many of the participants, including biologic scientists, stay for parts of the Liver Week which, at first sight, are of lesser concern to them. This permits important cross fertilization. The rather rich and varied social programme is worked out exceedingly well by the Falk Foundation, and demonstrates not only Herbert Falk’s meticulous interest for organizational detail but also his pleasure in showing his visitors that part of the world where he grew up. Moreover, the stimulating social programme provides an additional benefit, namely, physicians or biologic scientists, not particularly interested in hepatic problems, may be more ready to come to Basel to present their specialized work because of the interesting social activities and the many excursions.

I have described the Basel Liver Week in such detail not only to do justice to its importance in hepatology, but to point out how Herbert Falk’s intelligence, diligence, inventiveness, hospitality and friendliness are a key factor in its success.

Somewhat in between the ‘Fortbildungsveranstaltungen’ and the Basel Liver Week are additional scientific symposia held every year, dealing with various topics in hepatology and gastroenterology; they present a spectrum of varying emphasis from basic science to clinical application.

Herbert Falk’s role as publisher consists of the initiation and financial support of the books containing the papers presented at the various symposia, which have now reached number 39 and cover all of hepatology and a significant part of gastroenterology. The international contacts of the Falk Foundation increase the popularity of this, probably the largest series of hepatologic books in existence. Nevertheless, of far greater importance to the
growth and identification of hepatology as a discipline, and even exceeding the impact of the Basel Liver Week, is the series called HEPATOLOGY Rapid Literature Review, now entering its 14th year. It consists of the monthly publication of reproduced titles and original abstracts of virtually every paper dealing with hepatologic problems. They originate from journals all over the world, in any language, as long as an English summary is available. This ingenious idea of reproducing the original abstracts, and the monthly appearance of the volumes make rapid publication possible. Indeed in the United States the reader, if he subscribes to airmail delivery of the Review, becomes acquainted with the contents of, for instance, British journals before the original journal reaches him by surface mail. This rapid communication is, at least to the knowledge of this writer, not shared by hepatology with any other discipline. It has become an irreplaceable tool for any hepatologist who wishes to remain up-to-date with the literature, without personally surveying hundreds of different journals or depending only on titles available in Current Contents. The selection includes many journals publishing only the occasional paper on hepatology. Many of them are often rather highly specialized in clinical and, particularly, basic science problems and even the academic hepatologist may be barely aware of their existence. In addition, the monthly HEPATOLOGY Review contains statements, editorials and abstracts of meetings not only dealing with hepatology itself but also with other subjects in which hepatologic problems are presented. As hepatology as a discipline grew, so the monthly volumes increased in size, exceeding, as a rule, 400 pages, with each page containing several articles. To this main body of the volumes are added a few original scientific letters and recently Hepatitis Memoranda previously published by the National Institutes of Health (USA), as well as tables of contents of relevant books just published. Every year, an Abstract of Abstracts appears, reviewing the new information in all the twelve volumes of the year. A shortened German edition of the volumes is made available quarterly.

The listed achievements are augmented by Dr Falk’s intense desire to bring scientists in contact not only at the meetings but in between: by correspondence, provision of literature, and often by financial support of research work and of other activities in many parts of the world. Surely no other person who is not themself conducting clinical or laboratory research work in hepatology has done so much for the field. The enumeration of all these feats teaches us what one person can do and the mechanisms available in enhancing scientific communication. This is the lesson to medical sociology referred to in the introduction. It may apply to other disciplines in the future, but today they are a blessing to hepatology.

Herbert’s vital statistics deserve brief comment. Born 60 years ago in a small village, Müllheim in Baden, not far from Freiburg, he became, quite young, a soldier in the German Army during World War II. Serving in Rommel’s Africa Corps he was taken prisoner by the British, and was shortly afterwards shipped to the United States, where he worked for several years on various farms in Texas, Utah and Iowa. He describes these, apparently not too unpleasant, years as an opportunity to learn English and to get acquainted with the American ‘know-how’. After the war he worked for
2 years in the pharmacy (Apotheke) owned by his parents in Freiburg, studied pharmacy at the University of Freiburg, where he eventually graduated as Doktor der Naturwissenschaften. But simultaneously he studied medicine and obtained his second doctorate degree, namely, in medicine. During all this time, he acquired experience in the pharmacy, and for a while was active in research in the Division of Experimental Therapy of the University of Freiburg. Continuing to this day the supervision and ownership of the pharmacy. 20 years ago, he founded the pharmaceutical house which carries his name. Very soon after he engaged in the various activities just described and developed them, essentially supported by the income of his pharmaceutical house, with increasing skill and on an enlarging scale. Seven years ago these activities were taken over by the Falk Foundation, dedicated to the support of research in hepatic and biliary tract diseases. His academic interest in hepatology and gastroenterology has been recognized by membership in prestigious societies representing these fields.

The personal attributes of Herbert Falk, complex as they are, are the basis of his success. Outstanding are his restless drive, curiosity, generosity and loyalty to his friends. Despite his obvious abilities as a businessman, he is a serious student of biomedicine, at least of its hepatologic and gastroenterologic aspects, with surprising knowledge of the literature, old and new, and personal acquaintanceship with scientists all over the world.

He is highly intelligent, has a superb memory, and has a perfectionist interest in details as well as in broad organizational problems. His innovative spirit and inquisitiveness extend to a variety of other fields and to his recreational activities. He is interested in art and history, he loves nature and is a fanatic wanderer; this is reflected in another type of literature which he distributes, namely the yearly calendars, of Falk’s firm, which are illustrated with pictures of many sites and objects in the vicinity of his beloved Freiburg. He is a gourmet who has investigated the restaurants and inns around Freiburg and has published a guide describing them. On his extensive travels all over the world he carefully consults guide and reference books before he selects a hotel or a place for a meal. He is a connoisseur of wines but really prefers cold beer. Last but not least he is an amusing raconteur with whom it is a pleasure to spend an evening. He enjoys being with his family, his daughter and son, as well as with Ursula, his gracious and charming wife, a thoughtful adviser in all aspects of his work.

All of his friends, joined by hepatologists all over the world, wish him many happy returns on this signal birthday, and hope he will continue his activities for a long time to come.