

## In Memoriam

Erik Strömngren, 28.11.1909 – 15.03.1993

International psychiatry has lost one of its most prominent members with the death of Erik Strömngren. His psychiatric career was impressive. Only four years after his graduation from university, he published his thesis on contributions to psychiatric genetics based on epidemiological research of an island population, which has remained classic ever since.

At the age of 35 he was Professor of psychiatry and one of the leading psychiatrists in Scandinavia. His textbook of psychiatry was published in no less than 13 editions and was used throughout Scandinavia. For three decades he was editor of *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*. From 1955 onwards he was consultant and adviser to WHO, Mental Health Division, particularly in the areas of classification and epidemiology, and he contributed to the three ICD revisions (8, 9, 10) and to major international WHO projects. The World Psychiatric Association has also benefitted from his expertise as chairman of the Committee on Nomenclature and Classification. For almost half a century Erik Strömngren was a guest lecturer at universities and congresses all over the world, and chaired innumerable symposia and meetings. He held several honorary doctorates and memberships of international organizations and received a number of prizes, including the Kraepelin gold medal, in 1976, which was bestowed on him for an important part of his life-work.

In the late 1930s he paid a study visit to Kraepelin's Psychiatric Research Institute in Munich, after which model he eventually created a number of research institutes at the Aarhus Psychiatric Institute, including a national model register, and an eminent psychiatric library, now one of the most comprehensive research libraries in Northern Europe. In between all of this, Erik Strömngren was an inspiring leader and mentor to generations of research fellows, both national and international who, attracted by the atmosphere and facilities of the Institute, made scientific contributions of a very high standard. Erik Strömngren himself was active in research throughout his life, with the publication of some 500 titles, including outstanding contributions to psychiatric epidemiology and genetics.

He was also prominent in other fields of psychiatry. In 1938 he developed the first Danish classification system for mental disorders which was used in a multi-centre trial showing that convulsive therapy was effective in manic-depressive psychosis but that insulin shock therapy was ineffective in both manic-depressive psychosis and in schizophrenia. In the 1950s, he initiated the first placebo-controlled trial in clinical psychopharmacology (lithium in the acute treatment of mania). At the same time, he started one of the first consultation-liaison services in Europe, for family doctors (the island of Samsø project).

It was, therefore, no coincidence that he was asked in 1965 to chair the WHO Centre at the Aarhus Hospital which has participated in the WHO international projects and which today is a collaborating centre for research and training in mental health.

Following his retirement in 1980, Erik Strömngren continued to work unabated until just one week before his death. In his study room, which was placed at his disposal at the Institute of Psychiatric Demography, he was busy from early morning to late afternoon, if not abroad travelling as was often the case. In particular, he was engaged in a 50-year follow-up study of the island population on which he wrote his thesis in the 1930s, a study which he was about to complete at the time of his death.

It was quite natural that Erik Strömngren was asked to represent Scandinavia in 1984, when the Association of European Psychiatrists was established. He was held in high esteem by the Executive Committee of the AEP until the sixth congress last year in Barcelona. He then felt that the new generation of psychiatrists should take over, but he continued to follow the preparations for the next congress in Copenhagen, and he was still very concerned about the development of our new journal.

Erik Strömngren lived a long and meaningful life which corresponded to his exceptional abilities. He was unusually clear and penetrating in both his thinking and speech, at the same time of socratic modesty, most considerate and helpful, highly respected and beloved by both colleagues and patients. He died in the midst of his work, unimpaired by age after only one week of fatal illness. He leaves a gap and a void, but also a memory which will not be forgotten. As is written in the legendary Nordic poetry of the Edda: "Foes die and friends die, and in the end also you die, but your fame is undying if it is well won".

All honour to his memory.

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