

In Memoriam

Jean Cauchoix (1912-2009)



Professor Jean Cauchoix passed away on July 23, 2009. Together with Robert Merle d'Aubigné, Jean Cauchoix, who trained under the greatest surgeons of the pre-war era such as Lenormant, Gosset, Mathieu and Quenu, was the last one of those great figures who renovated orthopaedic surgery in France after World War II.

Jean Cauchoix was appointed "Chirurgien des Hôpitaux de Paris" in 1943, agrégé of the University and assistant to his senior friend Robert Merle d'Aubigné at Hôpital Cochin. His first position as department head at Ivry Hospital in 1954 was short-lived; his appointment as Head of the Orthopaedic Department at Saint-Louis Hospital the next year enabled him to set up an orthopaedic department in a historical although decrepit setting.

After WW II, he went on a study trip to America with Robert Merle d'Aubigné, visiting New York,

Chicago, Boston and Baltimore. This resulted in a number of discoveries regarding surgical techniques, organisation, anaesthesia and intensive care; it also initiated durable friendly relationships with a number of English speaking orthopaedic surgeons.

Robert Merle d'Aubigné had taken over Mathieu's position as Chairman of Orthopaedics and Traumatology at Paris University. The reform of university hospitals made it possible for him to create four new Chairs for P. Padovani, R. Judet, J. Debeyre and Jean Cauchoix.

Jean Cauchoix was made in charge of the department at Hôpital Beaujon, in which he was to stay until he retired. In 1955, he was selected to head the Institut Calot in Berck, which he was to reorganise and revive. He was at that time one of a few surgeons with expertise in both adult and children orthopaedics. Both units soon acquired international recognition, while his own activity focused more specifically on spine surgery. He developed during that period a durable relationship with Pierre Lacroix. He set up in Berck what was for him an old dream: a research laboratory on bone tissue, with the help of Jean Duriez and Gaston Heripret. Pierre Lacroix and Jean Dhem were members of its Council of management, and one of us was active in the laboratory for more than three years.

Spine surgery soon developed at Beaujon, where Jean Cauchoix was at the forefront of this demanding surgery and was impervious to fashion and to approximation. He was surrounded by a prestigious team including Jacques Duparc, André Lemoine, Alexandre Maschas, Michel Benoist, Alain Deburge, Benoit Lasalle.

Together with Jean-Jacques Rombouts and Daniel Paulet, we were fortunate being sent by

P. Lacroix to Beaujon and Calot, where we worked under this extremely demanding and rigorous chairman, who was at the same time full of consideration for his co-workers and for his patients.

His activity at Calot was extremely fruitful for Jean Cauchoix, as it enabled him to consider orthopaedic surgery as a whole, in children as well as in adults. He developed in Calot his technique of acute lengthening of the femur. He also developed spine surgery for Pott's disease and, shortly after Verbiest, for lumbar spine stenosis. He initiated scoliosis surgery, which he subsequently entrusted to Yves Cotrel, while Georges Morel was in charge of congenital dislocation of the hips. When they left Calot, he asked Daniel Chopin and Christian Morin to take charge respectively of the scoliosis unit and of the paediatric orthopaedic unit.

Jean Cauchoix was a member of numerous orthopaedic associations. He was Past-President and Honorary Member of SOFCOT, Honorary member of SORBCOT, Member of the British Orthopaedic Society, Founding Member of the International Society for the Study of the Lumbar Spine. He was an assiduous member of the French Académie de Médecine, in which he was still present a few weeks before he died ; he was also Honorary member of the French Académie de Chirurgie.

Jean Cauchoix displayed a rare combination of qualities. His thought and his actions were always remarkably precise and rigorous, which was particularly manifest in his teaching and in discussing difficult cases, which he would summarize in a few words. His postgraduate teaching, in the "Journées du Rachis", were attended by surgeons from all over the world. Intellectual honesty was among his prominent qualities. He was at the same time curious, about everything ; he was an experienced sailor as well as an expert skier and a devoted gardener, and he loved retiring in his fisherman's house in the Ile aux Moines.

Jean Cauchoix showed us all the path to be followed. He showed us that our demanding profession was wonderful when practiced with rigor and honesty. We were privileged working under him, and we will cherish the memory of this great gentleman of medicine.

To Carole, Barbara and Stéphanie, his daughters, to his grandchildren and particularly to Jessica, Physician of the Hôpitaux de Paris, and to his great-grandchildren, we wish to express our deep sorrow and sympathy.

I am particularly grateful to Jean-Claude Rey for his help in writing this testimony.

Jean-Pierre Ghosez