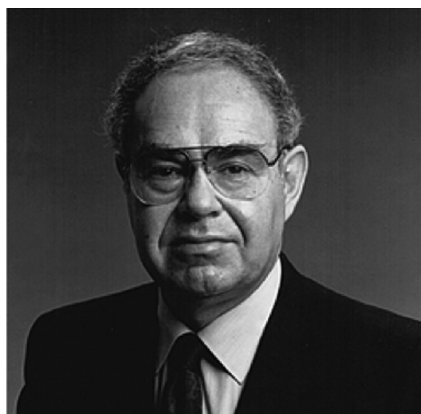

In Memoriam



George E. Ehrlich, MD

1929-2014

I was either a second or a third month intern at the Albert Einstein Medical Center in that hot summer of 1969 in Philadelphia. As I was presenting a case of gout to my attending Dr Warren Katz, he suddenly asked me whether I had ever seen a urate crystal under a polarising microscope. In another 15 minutes, with a tube of synovial fluid from my patient in my sweaty hands, Dr Katz was leading me and several other junior house officers, to his lab in the adjoining building, The Moss Rehabilitation Center where he kept his polarising microscope. As we were about to enter his lab the doors opened and another, but apparently more senior and definitely more distinguished physician came out. He exchanged a few words with my attending in low tones following which he turned to me and said "So you are from Istanbul, you must be then an expert on Behçet's disease." My hands became sweatier. The truth of the matter was that I had never seen a patient with Behçet's during my medical school from which I had recently graduated with flying colours. This was the very same institution where Prof. Hulusi Behçet had described the still most puzzling condition in 1937. So with a red face I admitted, not only had I never seen a urate crystal under a microscope but I had never seen a Behçet patient either. By this time I am sure you have gathered that this more senior physician was Dr George E. Ehrlich, both our attending's boss and also the founder and the physician in chief of the Moss Rehabilitation Center.

A few years later, after I chose rheumatology as my line of work I began to come across the name of George E. Ehrlich more and more. Initially it was through the frequent references to his work in my daily studies. I distinctly remember reading over and over again his excellent articles on inflammatory osteoarthritis, *i.e.* (1) which were probably stimuli to my once and admittedly short interest in that disease. With time I began to be interested more and more in Behçet's – did I take George's introductory words to me as a challenge and a stimulus?, I honestly do not know, but as you witness now, I cannot forget them and I had the pleasure of coming across him, this time in person, rather frequently. George, in brief, along with Desmond O'Duffy, had introduced Behçet's to North America. He also championed the idea of differing phenotypes for Behçet's in different

geographies, *Behçet's disease* in areas where it was endemic and *Behçet's syndrome* where it was sporadic (2). In a few more years, in 2000, we formed the ISBD (The International Study Group for Behçet's Disease) and George became one of its life-time honorary presidents.

A very fond memory I have of him belongs to Vienna some years ago. It was an after dinner chat. George had been born in Vienna and knew this beautiful city in and out. Moreover, he was a very learned man outside rheumatology as well and frequently combined his vast knowledge of literature, arts and humanities with his medical work. By the way, I would strongly advise you to read his gem of an article entitled Shakespeare's rheumatology (3). Anyhow, that particular evening he was giving me a much distilled account of art in Vienna when the conversation somehow drifted into daily politics. I guess we were both very critical of what was going on in the Middle-east at the time – surprise, surprise! – when, all of a sudden, and with slightly watery eyes, he said "Hasan, this is so un-American". With my whole secondary education in an American school, with good part of my medical training in the USA, and finally a very dear portion of my immediate family residing in that country, I could not agree with him more. Very befitting his well-known veracity and eloquence, George had once again masterfully amalgamated his strong criticism along with his genuine love of his country, in one brief uttering. I learned again.

George is survived by his beloved wife Gail, three children and four grandchildren and lots of scientific manuscripts, ideas and many students.

Hasan Yazici

References

1. EHRlich GE: Inflammatory osteoarthritis. I. The clinical syndrome. *J Chronic Dis* 1972; 25: 317-28.
2. EHRlich GE: Behçet disease and the emergence of thalidomide. *Ann Intern Med* 1998; 128: 494-5.
3. EHRlich GE: Shakespeare's rheumatology. *Ann Rheum Dis* 1967; 26: 562-3.