



Obituary

**Professor Dr. med. Dr. sc. tech. h.c.
Günter Baumgartner
(1 September 1924–11 August 1991)**

On August 11th Professor Günter Baumgartner passed away. He served as co-editor (1979–1980) and as managing editor (1981–1991) on the editorial board of this journal and had a decisive influence on the course of the journal. He was responsible for the topic of neuropsychiatry and must be credited for the high standard maintained in this field. Since November 1990 he knew the diagnosis of his own disease, for which a curative therapy does not exist. Despite his illness, he continued with great effort and enthusiasm to edit manuscripts until shortly before his death. This last year he bore himself with great discipline and dignity.

Günter Baumgartner was born in Waldshut in Germany, in the southern part of the Black Forest, where his father was a practicing physician. He grew up in a liberal environment where his intellectual interests could develop. Very early he showed a mistrust of false authority, an attitude which was reinforced by the current political doctrines of that time, and the fact that, after finishing school, he could not go on to university but had to spend the last years of the war as a soldier.

He studied medicine in Freiburg in Breisgau and wrote a thesis on a problem in respiration physiology. As a resident he developed an interest in neurology. In those post-war years, Professor Richard Jung built up a clinic which soon became a leader in research in German neurology. Professor Jung always insisted that only precise knowledge of basic neuroscience can further develop neurology as a clinical science. At that time in Freiburg, the engineer F. Tönnies developed the first machines which became instrumental in neurophysiological and clinical research. As early as 1952, R. Jung, R. von Baumgarten and G. Baumgartner published the first paper on single cell recordings in the visual cortex of the cat. Visual physiology remained Dr. Baumgartner's field of interest and specialty, in which he remained active all his life. Together with R. von Baumgarten, O. Creutzfeldt, and O. J. Grüsser, the Freiburg team were able to characterize the essential physiological properties of cells in the visual cortex. D. Hubel and T. Wiesel, who received the Nobel prize for their work, became his good friends and always stressed the fact that the Freiburg work was done entirely independently. The special merit of Dr. Baumgartner's scientific approach was that he developed hypotheses about cortical visual information processing based on psychophysical observations. From the distribution of light and dark perception in the Hermann grid he arrived at an estimate of receptive field size of visual cortical neurons in humans. During his last years he worked on illusory contours, and in this way was able to establish a common basis for subjective sensation and neurophysiological mechanisms.

Dr. Baumgartner spent 1957 as a resident in the Psychiatric Clinic in Waldau near Bern. In 1961, he became lecturer in neurology and neurophysiology at the University of Freiburg. In 1963/64, he spent a year in the Physiology Department at the University of Philadelphia, and another sabbatical in 1977/78 in the Physiology Department at Johns Hopkins University where he investigated mechanisms of visual perception.

In 1967, Dr. Baumgartner was appointed Professor and Head of the Department of Neurology at the University of Zürich where he remained in spite of several offers from other universities. From the small clinical department at that time in Zürich, he developed a clinic where basic research was fully integrated. One group continued to investigate the visual system at the level of single units, and soon other groups were established focusing on basic mechanisms of the EEG, clinical epilepsy research, neuropsychology of higher brain functions, neuromorphology and dementia research, and oculomotor and vestibular physiology. Although he played a very active role in basic research, he always remained a dedicated physician, who took the time to listen to patients and who stressed the importance of teaching at the bedside.

Günter Baumgartner received numerous honors, among others the Berger prize in 1961 and the Otto Naegeli prize in 1981. He was elected to the Academy of Sciences and Literature in Mainz, and to the German Academy of Natural Sciences Leopoldina in Halle. In 1989, he received an honorary doctorate from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zürich. Günter Baumgartner died on 11 August 1991, two months before he would have retired.

V. Henn, Zürich