

EDITORIAL

Markku Miettinen · Eero Saksela

Erkki Saxén 75 years old

Erkki Saxén, the Emeritus Chairman of the Pathology Department at the University of Helsinki, will be 75 years old on 23 August 1996. He has been active in the entire field of pathology ranging from cancer epidemiology to experimental pathology, not least through his long period of office as the Editor of the *International Journal of Cancer*.

Erkki Saxén, son of the Chairman of Pathology at the University of Helsinki, had a focus on pathology from the onset of his career. Following his service at the front in the Finnish army World War II, he worked his way up from instructor to professor of pathology within a mere 10 years. Some of his important contributions to the literature during this time include a monograph on Schwann cell tumors, a histological description of lymph node toxoplasmosis, explained as the background to a lesion then known as Piringer's lymphadenitis, and a series of analyses of thyroid tumors with reference to the endemic nature of goiter in Finland; many of these studies he completed in collaboration with his brother Lauri Saxén, also a professor of pathology at the University of Helsinki. Both lymph node and thyroid pathology have since been the subjects of further studies conducted by Erkki Saxén's many disciples. His numerous papers relating to cancer epidemiology emphasize the importance of accurate diagnosis if epidemiological studies are to be reliable. Erkki Saxén's orientation toward cancer pathology was reinforced by a research fellowship allowing him to work with Harold L. Stewart at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, a period he remembers with warmth. From 1960 until his retirement in 1986 Erkki Saxén was the Chairman of the Department of Pathology at the University of Helsinki.

M. Miettinen (✉)

Armed Forces Institute of Pathology,
Department of Soft Tissue Pathology,
14th St. & Alaska Avenue, Washington,
DC 20306–6000, USA

E. Saksela

Department of Pathology,
University of Helsinki, Haartman Institute, P.O. Box 21,
FIN-00014 Helsinki, Finland



Erkki Saxén, the founder and director of the Finnish Cancer Registry, was the prime architect of this national cancer registry, which is among the oldest in the world and enjoys an international reputation. From humble beginnings, Erkki Saxén and his staff built up the Registry into one of the world's finest cancer registries. It has comprehensive entries for all cases of cancer diagnosed in Finland from 1953 onward. Under Erkki Saxén's leadership the registry has combined reliable histopathological classification with virtually perfect patient follow up, yielding many epidemiological landmark studies.

In view of his recognized merits in cancer epidemiology, Erkki Saxén was invited to give the Maude Abbott Lecture at the US-Canadian Academy of Pathology in 1978. Erkki Saxén acted as the president of the 9th congress of the International Academy of Pathology and the 7th European Congress of Pathology, which he organized with his staff at the University of Helsinki. He was the

president of the International Academy of Pathology from 1980 to 1982.

As the first editor of the *International Journal of Cancer*, the official journal of the International Union of Cancer, Erkki Saxén has left a permanent mark on the literature on cancer research. He built up this journal to be one of the most prestigious in the field and worked tirelessly as its editor for nearly two decades.

Cell-biology-based techniques in pathology advanced rapidly during the 1980s. During this time, Erkki Saxén's leadership, vision, and whole-hearted support were instrumental in the success of studies related to tumor immunohistochemistry, many of which were conceptually pioneered in his department. During his tenure immunohistochemistry developed from an esoteric procedure to an essential supplementary technique necessary to everyone who practices pathology. The successful merger of

cell-biological and traditional histopathological concepts was facilitated by the merger of the experimental and clinical branches of the department of pathology that took place under Erkki Saxén's leadership in 1978. It was his enthusiastic support that made it possible for the intermediate filaments immunohistochemistry research to flourish in the department, starting with basic science in the 1970s and progressing to clinical applications in the 1980s and beyond. Since his retirement as the Chairman of the Pathology Department in 1986, Erkki Saxén has continued to serve in his capacity as Emeritus Chairman, still involved in diagnostic pathology and sharing his vast experience as a diagnostic consultant.

We believe that the editors and readers of *Virchow's Archiv* will join us in wishing Erkki Saxén a happy 75th birthday and many more good years in pathology, as well as with his family and friends.