

Obituary Prof. Michael Höllwarth (1943-2024)

Michael passed-away at home on March 12, 2024. These are very sad news for the pediatric surgery community at large but particularly for the European one. He was born in Tyrol, attended the Innsbruck University Medical School and trained there as a surgeon. He became a pediatric surgeon in Bremen under Professor Rehbein and later in Graz with Professor Sauer. He spent some time as a research fellow in physiology in the U.S.A.

He was appointed Professor of Pediatric Surgery at the University of Bern, Switzerland in the early 90s and finally, in 1997 he succeeded his teacher Sauer at the University of Graz where he developed his brilliant career until his retirement in 2012.

Michael was a quite unique pediatric surgeon. He had a strong personality and clear ideas. He was able to build in Graz an amazingly strong group that covered all areas of our specialty, he worked with them in research and strongly stimulated a number of young individuals that eventually settled in other countries.

Among his strong ideas, one of the more relevant for us was the feeling that there was a need for a European association able to put together pediatric surgeons from all countries including those from the Eastern side that were still beyond some sort of wall. At the beginning, the only "international" pediatric surgical meeting was the BAPS. Later, two more meetings developed, the north-Western and the south-Eastern that worked for some time. Then, mainly pushed forward by Michael and others, the first EUPSA appeared as an association of national societies. And then he had the idea of founding the new EUPSA, an association of individual surgeons that grew until what it is now, one of the largest of the world. I

I remember when we discussed whether it was pertinent to have a yearly meeting. Many of us, including me, were somewhat shy and were more into a every-other-year schedule to evolve progressively into the current one. But Michael and some others were right and insisted starting the annual congress with the amazing success that you all know.

Many of us present at the Executive Board meetings of the EUPSA for many years remember his adamant insistence on the need for keeping modest membership fees, not very fancy social programs and always a particular attention to the surgeons from the Eastern countries that could hardly afford regular registration fees.

He was the first President and his imprint remained ever since. After retirement he attended the EB meetings every year and tried to maintain his strong principles and, believe me, he was difficult to contradict.

His editorial work was also remarkable. He was Co-Editor of the second more important journal of our specialty Pediatric Surgery International founded by Professor Schärli, wrote and edited a number of successful books (most in association with his close friend Professor Puri) and wrote articles on many topics.

On top of these activities, he knew how to gather the old and new stars of the pediatric surgical world by generously inviting them to a unique meeting in Küthai, Tyrol year after year. No more than 20 individuals with their partners enjoyed a fascinating program in which some hours of skiing (top quality was not necessary) alternated with smashing scientific sessions in which they had to present and discuss new developments at their own places and the most complicated cases of the year. And Michael organized every detail masterfully in a warm and friendly atmosphere.

He was a remarkably active person and his passion for bridge after he retired almost matched the one he felt for pediatric surgery

We lost a great friend. I invite all of you to acknowledge his contributions that undoubtedly will last.

May he rest in peace.

Juan A. Tovar, MD, PhD, EBPS, FRCS (Hon), FAAP (Hon), MDGFC (Hon)