

Tribute Czech Clinical Pharmacology

Folke Sjöqvist's overall importance for Clinical Pharmacology

Professor Folke Sjöqvist passed away on March 30, 2020 at the age of 86 years in Stockholm, Sweden. He was a true pioneer in clinical pharmacology world-wide and the founder of this medical specialty both in Swedish healthcare and academia. It is almost impossible to cover all areas where Folke made important contributions so below follows only a selection of some true milestones in our broad discipline.

Folke's career started at Karolinska Institutet with an MD-degree in 1959 followed by experimental research and a PhD on cholinergic transmission in 1962. As post-doctoral fellow, he joined the legendary Bernard B. Brodie's laboratory at the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, USA. He was then introduced to the field of drug metabolism and novel methods of drug analysis in biological matrices. These tools made it possible to study interindividual variability in pharmacokinetics and Folke early understood this would be of significant clinical relevance as a guide for individualised dosing in many therapeutic areas. In Karolinska University Hospital today, our laboratory service covers therapeutic drug monitoring of more than 150 agents, mainly immune-modulating drugs, anti-epileptics, anti-infectives, psychiatric drugs, cardiovascular drugs, and antineoplastic drugs.

During his American post-doc period, Folke also studied scientific approaches to clinical trials at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, under the mentorship of Professor Louis Lasagna. Perhaps he already then could foresee that clinical pharmacology would develop a leadership in critical drug evaluation and evidence-based medicine, including the establishment of drug information centers with individual, case-based pharmacotherapeutic advice and the evidence-based input to Drug and Therapeutics Committees at the regional or national level. Obviously, clinical trial design remains a key competence for clinical pharmacologists in academia, the pharmaceutical industry and drug regulatory agencies.

Folke became the first Swedish chair in clinical pharmacology, in Linköping back in 1970 and thereafter at Karolinska Institutet from 1972 at the newly established Huddinge University Hospital. His early academic work included pioneering twin studies to identify genetic differences in the metabolism and pharmacokinetics of antidepressant drugs, later characterised in detail in relation to the CYP2D6 polymorphism. Under his leadership, this pharmacogenetic field developed rapidly especially through translational, mechanistic studies in collaboration with Magnus Ingelman-Sundberg at Karolinska Campus. Today, there are several clinical examples where patient genotyping is recommended prior to treatment as a basis for drug selection and/or individualised starting dose. The academic activities initiated by Folke have remained high for decades with numerous international guests and long-standing collaborations with Europe and other continents, employing both mechanistic-molecular and pharmacoepidemiological approaches.

Folke's international commitments were countless and included among others IUPHAR (International Union of Basic and Clinical Pharmacology), the WHO, CIOMS (Council for International Organizations of Medical Science) and EACPT (European Association for Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics).

Folke was curious by nature and had a strong research mind willing to explore and explain variability in the effects of drug treatment on different patients. He understood intuitively how experimental methods and drug assays could be applied clinically to improve patient care. He always argued for the importance of clinical pharmacology making a difference in healthcare and thereby positioned the discipline well-integrated in the hospital and the clinical needs of the healthcare system.



Folke has been a strong inspiration and mentor for us and many other colleagues. We remember Folke as a visionary, energizing and powerful leader. He cared about his staff and collaborators irrespective of background or position. Folke was long active and dedicated to our work and development for years after retirement. We keep him and his excellent achievements in fond memory.

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