

Obituary

Doctor Pierre Houssa

Dr Pierre Houssa, who took his degree in medicine at the Free University of Brussels (U.L.B.) on 15 July 1932, was faced at the outset of his medical career with a choice between Pharmacodynamics or Surgery. Indeed, for some time, he worked both as an independent research worker, i.e. Assistant at the Pharmacodynamics Laboratories of the Faculties of Medicine in Paris (Tiffeneau) and Brussels (Zunz and Labarre), as well as Assistant in the surgical section of La Salpêtrière, Paris (A. Gosset) and Brugmann, Brussels (F. Neuman) Hospitals.

I first had the pleasure of meeting him in 1943. The Surgical Section under Mister Neuman had, by order of the occupying forces, been transferred from the Brugmann Hospital to the Bordet Medical Institute. As a young and unknown houseman, I felt reassured by the warm working atmosphere that had been created by its Head and one of the resident surgeons, Dr Houssa.

Eighteen months later, on 3 September 1944, it so happened that this same Dr Houssa became resident surgeon at the Ixelles Hospital where I was working.

Shortly afterwards, we were to meet again at St Pierre Hospital. He was on the lookout for someone and asked me whether I was interested in Rehabilitation. I accepted and began my new duties almost immediately. That is the sort of man he was: both frank and persuasive in his questions.

This twofold aspect of his character allowed him to build an outstanding career, entirely devoted to caring for and helping the handicapped. Without doubt, Dr Pierre Houssa put Rehabilitation on its feet not only in Belgium but throughout the world with the help of a few other idealists.

Under the cloak of wartime he learned to take care of the wounded, and after the war he devoted himself passionately to helping the victims of the conflict. There were those who had sometimes miraculously survived the concentration camps, as well as the children who had suffered from the fighting. This only strengthened his resolve to set up a Rehabilitation Centre within the University Hospitals of the Free University of Brussels.

As early as 1946, whilst Secretary General of the University of Brussels Medical Doctors Association, he set about this task and such was his dedication that on 6 December 1948 he was able to found his non-profit-making Centre of Traumatology and Rehabilitation, and on 1 September 1950 the first Centre of Rehabilitation in Belgium opened its doors.

And yet his dream had not been fully realized. From then on he was totally committed to showing just how useful Rehabilitation is, its therapeutic role and goals, in promoting not only functional rehabilitation but also social reintegration and professional resettlement. He was to demonstrate this by building up and developing the activities of 'his' Centre of Traumatology and Rehabilitation (C.T.R.) to the point where it became a pilot-centre in which team work and close cooperation between patients and staff played a vital role.

The value of his work in this field was recognised abroad even earlier than at home, except for Mr Albert Van Goethem, Mr Fernand Heger and the Count de Launoit, who had done so in giving him the opportunity of setting up the C.T.R.

In 1954 he was appointed Expert to the Commission for Rehabilitation of the World Federation of Ex-Servicemen; in 1955 to the Commission of the World Health Organisation (WHO); in 1957 to the European Coal and Steel Community; in 1957 again, member of the Committee of the International Society for the Welfare of Crippled (I.S.W.C.); in 1961 founding member of the International Medical Society of Paraplegia (I.M.S.P.); in 1966 member of the World Commission of Rehabilitation International (R.I.); in 1969 member of the Rehabilitation Research Group of the World Federation of Neurology (W.F.N.) and in the same year founding member of the European Medical Academy of Rehabilitation. As an expert, he was sent to Lebanon, Tunisia, Cameroon and Albania.

His numerous involvements around the world did not prevent him from promoting the idea of rehabilitation in Belgium as a member of the Board, later as President of the Commission Médicale de l'Oeuvre Nationale des Invalides de Guerre (National Fund for War Invalids); member of the Governing Body, later President of the Comité Médico-Technique du Fonds National de Reclassement Social des Handicapés (National Fund for Social Resettlement); founding President of the Union Professionnelle des Médecins Belges Spécialistes en Réadaptation et des Séminaires Belges de Réadaptation, President of the Association des Médecins de l'Université de Bruxelles (A.M.U.B.), member of the Fédération Nationale des Ergothérapeutes (National Federation of Occupational Therapists), member of the Comité National pour la Réadaptation des Handicapés (National Committee for the Rehabilitation of the Handicapped), founder of the Fédération Sportive Belge des Handicapés (Belgian Sports Federation of Handicapped), and many other national working groups.

He was Senior Lecturer at the Free University of Brussels from 1961 onwards, and Professor at the Higher Institute for Physical Education and Physiotherapy in 1969, Training Period Supervisor at the University of Rennes in 1966 and founded the teaching of occupational therapy in Belgium.

In recognition of his valuable work, he was awarded a number of high distinctions: the Princess Jean de Mérode Award in 1955; the Prize for Rehabilitation of the World Federation of Ex-Servicemen in 1961; the International Prize of the Spanish Association of Invalids and Handicapped in 1963; he was made Grand Officier de l'Ordre de la Couronne in 1973 and received the Albert Schweizer Award in 1975.

It is said that no one is irreplaceable but some leave their mark forever ... as did this man whom we lost on 9 June 1985.

All Handicapped people and those who worked with him owe him a great debt of gratitude.

Albert Tricot