

Obituary

Konrad Schauenstein (1944–2007)



On May 22, 2007, Professor Konrad Schauenstein, a regular contributor to the *Journal of Neuroimmunology*, died after a long battle with pancreatic cancer. Konrad was born on November 4, 1944, in Graz, Austria, where he also went to Medical School.

Konrad was one of my earliest postdocs after my returning to Vienna from a three-year postdoctoral stage at the Center for Immunology led by Ernest Witebsky in Buffalo, NY, in 1970. This was the time when we had to build our own research group at the Institute for General and Experimental Pathology at the Medical School of the University of Vienna. Konrad was an instrumental figure in this project. He joined a small crew of dedicated young scientists eager to solve questions in the field of autoimmunity and developmental and comparative immunology. In contrast to the rest of us, after graduation Konrad

finished training as a general practitioner, i.e. was the only “real doctor” in the lab, a fact that later proved to be of great value for his approach to immunological research and our teaching program for medical students. Konrad was also an accomplished musician who – besides his successful medical studies – also had a degree (violin) from the Conservatory of Graz. No wonder that discussions on many aspects of classical music, notably J.S. Bach, filled the gaps between experiments, and thus also broadened our horizon beyond the main scientific topics. In addition to being a highly original and hard worker, Konrad also contributed his typical dry humour that made our days inside and outside the lab pure pleasure. I still remember our many trips to various scientific meetings, especially those to countries behind the former Iron Curtain, where we not only presented our data and met our less-privileged Eastern colleagues, but also

carefully planned the exodus of some of them to the west under rather dangerous conditions. Konrad was a perfect teacher and mentor and several of his students later embarked on highly successful international careers.

In Vienna, Konrad began his work on autoimmunity using the Obese strain (OS) of chickens with spontaneous autoimmune thyroiditis as a model for human Hashimoto disease. He continued and extended this work after moving with me to the Institute of Pathophysiology at the Medical School of the University of Innsbruck, Austria, where he established his own group and also acted as deputy head of the Institute. This was the time when Konrad gained his profile in immunoendocrinology, where his gift for integrative thinking turned out to be decisive for his seminal discoveries.

Based on the early work of Sorkin and Besedovsky who originally had demonstrated the interaction of the neuroendocrine with the immune system via the hypothalamo–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis in normal rats, Konrad was the first to extend this concept to autoimmunity by showing an altered immunoendocrine feedback regulation in OS chickens (Schauenstein et al., 1987). This observation was later corroborated by others with regard to animals susceptible to experimentally-induced autoimmune diseases, as well as by ourselves for murine lupus. Whether the “chicken concert” that Konrad gave with some of his friends in our Animal Unit enhanced the preconditioning of the birds before taking blood sampling has, however, not been evaluated.

Konrad also excelled in methodological achievements, notably in the area of immunofluorescence, albeit before the advent of the age of patenting all scientific results. Thus, he invented the multichannel micropipette (Schauenstein et al., 1976), and also showed how using short laser light pulses allowed for continuous observation of immunofluorescent preparations without bleaching (Schauenstein et al., 1975).

Via his interest in thymic development and function, Konrad gradually moved to aging research and decided to spend two years (1980–1981) at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot, Israel, in the laboratory of Amelia Globerson. Several high impact papers on age-related aspects of thymic development with special emphasis on autoimmune diseases emanated from this sojourn (Grinblat et al., 1983), again not to forget his musical achievements, e.g. a concert at the Dead Sea Resort 417 m below sea level where he not only played the “finest” but also “deepest” Mozart (© Michael Feldmann, Weizmann Institute).

In 1986, Konrad became Professor and Chairman of the Institute for Pathophysiology at the Medical School of the University of Graz, Austria. There, he successfully recruited a new group of young collaborators working on the dialogue between the immune system and the sympathetic and parasympathetic neuroendocrine systems with special emphasis on age-related changes of this interaction (Rinner and Schauenstein, 1991). Other topics to which Konrad and his group made important contributions included the role of proinflammatory cytokines in juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (Mangge et al., 2002), the immunoregulatory role of melatonin (Liebmann et al., 1996),

the function of adipokines (Pilz et al., 2005), and most recently, stem cell biology (Schwinger et al., 2006).

During all these years, Konrad stayed in close contact with his former colleagues in Innsbruck now mourning the loss of a brilliant and cherished friend who incorporated the three main virtues of a good scientist: innovation, diligence and passion. We have lost a friend and our sympathy goes to his wife Sharon, and his children Anna, Karl, Max and Rudi.

Georg Wick

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Editorial note:

On behalf of the editorial office, the editorial board and our readership, we extend condolences to Sharon and her family.

Cedric S. Raine

New York,

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