

Peter Macklem



Pulmonologists all over the world have a lot for which to thank Professor Peter Macklem. He was among those very few colleagues who upgraded our specialty from the old tuberculosis care in sanatoriums to become today's modern Pulmonology. The vehicle that carried us towards the investigation and understanding of underlying mechanisms, scientific diagnostic approach and therapeutic search was PHYSIOLOGY. Peter Macklem was one of the most dynamic and inspired drivers of this vehicle for over 50 years, from his graduation from Queen's University in 1956 until his recent death on February 11, 2011.

Peter Macklem, who was both a consummate physician and a scientific researcher with deep knowledge and a ceaseless desire for quest, headed a flourishing period at the Meakins-Christie Laboratories and Royal Victoria Hospital of McGill University. During his time McGill University was considered the Mecca, the centre of the world, for respiratory disorders, and thousands of physicians, including many current leaders of our specialty,

were trained and employed there, under the passionate and visionary guidance of Peter Macklem.

His elaborate and versatile research activities, and especially his inspired research on small airway function, have been considered a turning point in pulmonology. The transition from health to disease, as described by Peter, has broadened our horizons and increased our understanding of the early stages of asthma, COPD and other airway disorders,

and our comprehension of the effects of smoking, resulting in earlier diagnosis and more effective treatment with inhalatory devices and drugs targeted at the peripheral airways. He described respiratory muscle function and fatigue, and the mechanisms of dyspnoea and respiratory failure, paving the way for the invention by his students of ventilators and non-invasive mechanical ventilation techniques. In recent decades, Peter was the one to express and promote the necessity for better collaboration between Physiology and Biology. He also felt the need to extend his analysis to the complex model of the respiratory system, which, had he had been given the time, might have been progressed to a model of the perfect "artificial lung".

Little comment is needed about his numerous distinctions, since they are completely understandable even for those who do not know them all. Therefore, I invite all his lifetime students to light a mental candle in the memory of the physician, researcher and Professor, Peter Macklem, as a last honorary distinction. Let us, in particular, also honour him from this small country, Greece, which Peter loved so much and in which he worked passionately.



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