



In Memoriam Prof. Dr. med. Ulrich R. Müller, Bern

*It is with deep sadness that we say goodbye to Dr. Ulrich Müller, a highly respected allergist and former chief physician of the Ziegler Hospital in Bern. Ulrich Müller passed away on 8 October 2023 in Bern. His work on insect venom allergies has led to the development of new therapeutic approaches, improved diagnostic methods and a higher quality of life for countless people with insect venom allergies in Switzerland and far beyond. His life's work will continue to benefit generations of allergy sufferers.*

Ulrich Müller was born shortly after his twin brother on December 3, 1941. He spent his childhood, school and adolescence in Bern, where he began his medical studies at the University of Bern, supplemented by semesters abroad in Paris, Vienna and London. In 1969 he met Uta Gierok, whom he married in 1970. They had two daughters, Tina and Yvonne.

He completed his training in internal medicine at the Inselspital/Bern, the Hammersmith Hospital in London, the University of Basel, and finally at the Ziegler Hospital/Bern, where he soon became a senior physician. Inspired by his clinical teacher R. Hoigné, he became interested in allergies, first drug allergies, then more and more insect venom allergies. In the canton of Bern, with its many beekeepers and bees, people kept dying from acute insect venom allergies, and there was still no therapy. Immunotherapy with whole-body extracts from bees proved to be useless, and new forms of therapy were needed. In 1979, Ueli and his family embarked on a 2-year fellowship at the Allergy Research Center with Dr. C. Arbesman/Dr. E. Middleton/Prof. R.E. Reisman in Buffalo General Hospital, Buffalo, NY/USA. There he learned biochemical methods to identify the allergenic proteins of the insect venom extracts; immunotherapy was switched to purified insect venom proteins, and suddenly it worked. Thousands of allergic shocks and hundreds of deaths have been avoided since.

After returning to Bern, he initially worked as a senior physician in the medical department of the Ziegler Hospital and set up an allergy laboratory. He completed his doctorate on the topic of "New therapeutic approaches for allergic diseases". In 1981 he was appointed Chief Physician of the Medical Department, Ziegler Hospital, first together with Prof. R. Hoigné and later with Prof. K. Neftel. From mid-2000 until the end of 2006, he was the sole director of the Medical Clinic of the Ziegler Hospital.

Immunotherapies with bee and wasp venom extracts became his core research area. He was interested in which allergen extract one should use, for how long, what to do in case of cross-reactions, etc.: he was interested in practical questions to improve the patient's quality of life. The allergy laboratory at the Ziegler Hospital was regarded worldwide as a small "Mecca" for those who dealt with this specific field. The patients came from all over Switzerland, and scientists from Europe, Russia and China worked in the "allergy laboratory". The first highlight of his scientific career was the book: "Insect Sting Allergy - Clinic, Diagnostics and Therapy", Stuttgart; New York. Fischer, 1988, which was so successful that it had to be translated from its original German version into English (1990).

For decades, Ueli Müller was *the authority* in the field of insect venom allergies: he established how to make the diagnosis, and how to treat prophylactically and in acute situations. If there was a problem with insect venom allergies in Switzerland – one said: "Just ask the `bee-Müller`" in Bern! His in-depth

clinical training was very advantageous – because problems often arose about acute anaphylactic shock, the most dangerous form of allergy, which Ueli knew better than anyone else.

If you went to a congress, he was often present – he was known as an excellent speaker and lectured on insect venom allergies, immunotherapy and anaphylaxis. His presentations were clear, simple, clinically oriented; you learned a lot from him and you could always take something home with you relevant for your daily clinical practice. He became a mentor to many aspiring allergists and shaped the next generation of allergists. His competence was also recognized abroad and in 2001 he was awarded the title 'Doctor honoris causa' by the University of Wrocław in Poland for his contribution to the improvement in the field of allergology.

Prof. Müller was a leading member of the EAACI Working Group on Insect Venom Hypersensitivity for many years, he was also a Fellow of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology and, last but not least, active in the Swiss Society of Allergology and Immunology (SSAI): He was fluent in various languages and thus became a very eloquent president of SSAI from 2005-2007. Highly remarkable was the generous donation of him and his family which allowed to establish the Ulrich Müller Gierok Allergy Foundation, which successfully supported practical allergological research in Switzerland for 10 years (2008-2018).

Although allergology was the focus of his scientific life, Ueli Müller was primarily a doctor, a passionate doctor. As an excellent clinician and chief physician of internal medicine, Ueli was constantly present at the Zieglerspital. He continued to take part in the night and weekend shifts of the senior doctors, which was quite unusual for a chief physician. He had a profound clinical knowledge of the entire field of internal medicine and was considered an outstanding clinical teacher: under his leadership, well over 100 assistants and senior physicians were trained.

Ueli Müller – an outstanding allergist and excellent clinician! But what made him stand out most was his human nature: he always remained humble, helpful, attentive and supportive of those willing to learn. He couldn't stand laziness and sloppiness – and that was a good thing. Due to his social competence, even difficult changes in the hospital, which he had to implement as chief physician, were always supported by the medical team. As a colleague once whispered to me after a lecture by Ueli: For her, Ueli is the epitome of the (good) Swiss: reliable, with integrity, honesty, competent, incorruptible! To this we would like to add: with an extraordinary commitment to the patients!

Ueli was cordial in his dealings – except on the football field, where he was a fierce defender. You could always feel his humour, openness and generosity; He and his wife Uta have been great hosts for many Bernese, Swiss and foreign guests.

After his retirement in 2007, he continued to be active, publishing various reviews and papers. He took more care of the family and had a lot of fun with his granddaughters Amina and Smilla.

After the death of his beloved wife Uta in 2016, life became quieter around him. He withdrew more and more and spent the last few years in his home in Wabern/Bern. He died on Sunday, October 8, 2023 in Bern.

With Ueli Müller, the allergological community has lost an outstanding scientist and doctor, but above all a role model of competence, modesty and kindness. Ueli Müller was unique, we will miss him.

Arthur Helbling, Oliver Hausmann & Werner J Pichler

and all allergologists who had the chance to work with Ulrich and to learn from him