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Obituary Professor Jean Aicardi 1926–2015



Jean Aicardi, one of the doyens of child neurology and epilepsy left us on the morning of August 3rd 2015. Born to a large family in Rambouillet a small city near Paris, he had his early medical training in Paris where Prof. Raymond Garcin with whom he trained kindled his interest in clinical neurology. Though child neurology was not even a recognized specialty then, he charted his own course in this nascent field and is now recognized as one of the fathers of child neurology & pediatric epilepsy.

Realising the need for clinical research in the much-ignored field of epilepsy, he devoted much of his professional life to studying this area. His work on infantile seizures / epilepsies was among the earliest systematic studies in this area focusing on febrile seizures and status epilepticus. At the University Hospital Necker-Enfants Malades in Paris where he trained and later headed the Pediatric Neurology unit, he and colleagues described several novel neurologic entities some of them bearing his name – Aicardi syndrome, Aicardi-Goutieres syndrome, Rett Syndrome, Alternating Hemiplegia of Infancy and others.

In 1986 he was appointed Director of Research at the prestigious French National Institutes of Health and Medical Research (INSERM), a position he held for 5 years. After mandatory retirement at the age of 65 yrs. , Professor Aicardi was not about to hang up his boots and moved to the Institutes of Child Health, London, UK as Honorary Professor of Child Neurology where he continued teaching, research and patient care. He also visited the Miami Children's Hospital Epilepsy / Child Neurology Unit in Miami, USA as a visiting professor where I had the privilege of interacting with him for several weeks.

During his extremely productive career he published > than 250 articles in high-impact peer-reviewed journals, wrote > 120 articles and published three internationally acclaimed books – *Aicardi's Epilepsy in Children* (2004), *Diseases of the Nervous System* (2009) and *Movement Disorders in Children* (2001).

He was awarded several academic honours including the *Hower Award* from the Child Neurology Society in 1986 and the *Epilepsy Research Award* from the American Epilepsy Society in 1995. He was the founding editor of the educational journal of the ILAE – *Epileptic Disorders*.

“Monsieur Aicardi” as his hundreds of students who he mentored over the years knew him was a natural teacher who taught us “*that a major part of examination, and one too often neglected, consists of watching spontaneous activity of the child ... the best manner of assessing CNS function but also behavior*”. He believed that “*the clinic remains fundamental in child neurology*”

Where educated observations by an astute clinician is what guides scientific investigation into what is unexplained. We had the good fortune of learning from him at two national conferences / workshops we had organized where we also met his charming wife.

Even though he achieved such heights in his career, he essentially remained a humble man respectful towards everybody and more than willing to give thoughtful advice to many physicians on difficult cases.

Farewell Professor Aicardi, you will be sorely missed.

Dr. Vrajesh Udani, Consultant- Child Neurology & Epilepsy
P.D. Hinduja National Hospital & Medical Research Centre, Mumbai