

OBITUARIES

Waldemar F. Kirchheimer, M.D., Ph.D.
1913–2001

Dr. Waldemar F. Kirchheimer died on 6 April 2001 in a nursing home, the Life Care Center, in Burien, Washington, U.S.A., following numerous health problems including heart attacks, coronary by-pass surgery, loss of hearing, and marked difficulty in walking. Our deepest condolences go to his wife, May.

Dr. Kirchheimer (Wally to his friends) was born in Schneidemuhl, Germany, (now Pila, Weilkopolskie, Poland) and received his M.D. degree from the Ludwigs University Medical Faculty in Giessen, Germany, in 1937. In his earlier years he was an accomplished athlete, an Olympic-class distance runner; he continued to run as a hobby and he maintained that practice for many years until hip disease robbed him of that pleasure in his 60s. Wally was a man of strong convictions. He bitterly opposed the Nazi government of Germany and left the country to fight in the Spanish Civil War against Fascism. Following this he stowed away on a freighter, whose destination he did not know at the time, to escape from Spain. The vessel arrived in due time in 1938 in Seattle, Washington, in the U.S.A. Wally was penniless but managed to find work as a resident physician in the King County Tuberculosis Hospital to support himself. There he met and married his wife, Esther May. Their first home was a houseboat.

In time he began graduate school at the University of Washington. He obtained his Ph.D. in microbiology under Dr. Russel Weiser in 1947. His dissertation research demonstrated the passive transfer of tuberculin sensitivity in guinea pigs with cells. This established him and his advisor as pio-

neers in what was to become the field of cellular immunology.

After teaching and doing research on tuberculin hypersensitivity at the University of Washington for several years, Wally left for the Northwestern University School of Medicine in Chicago where he spent 6 years as an Assistant/Associate Professor of Microbiology. He then joined the staff at Fort Detrick, Maryland, as a medical bacteriologist. He joined the U.S. Public Health Service in 1961 as a scientific administrator at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, a part of the National Institutes of Health. The following year he came to Carville to serve as the Chief of the Microbiology Research Section of the Laboratory Branch under Dr. George Fite. Upon Dr. Fite's retirement, Wally became Chief of the newly designated Laboratory Research Branch. He continued to head the Microbiology Research Department, and was joined by Dr. Prabhakaran as Chief of the Biochemistry Research Department, and later by myself as Chief of the Pharmacology Research Department. In later years an Immunology Research Department and a Pathology Research Department were added to the Laboratory Research Branch and a reorganized Animal Care Department was created.

Wally was author or co-author of over 100 publications covering a wide range of interests in microbiology. Together with distinguished Indian colleagues, he studied the possibility of leprosy transmission via biting arthropods under field conditions in India. He worked extensively on the cultivation of *Mycobacterium leprae in vitro* with negative results. He is probably best remembered for being the author, with his collaborator, Dr. Eleanor Storrs, of the landmark publication in 1971 describing the disseminated disease which develops following the inoculation of nine-banded ar-

madillos with leprosy bacilli. This model provided large amounts of *M. leprae* for various purposes and served as a model of lepromatous leprosy in man. It was later used, among many other things, to study the transmission of the disease and its pathogenesis with regard to nerve damage, and to study the extent and distribution of the naturally occurring leprosy that exists among armadillos in the wild.

In the more than 20 years that Wally and May resided on the station at Carville, they were widely appreciated as good neighbors and as charming and considerate hosts. On many occasions young leprosy physicians came to know established, visiting leprosy investigators at social gatherings in the Kirchheimers' living room, a room overlooked by an oil portrait over the couch of their much beloved, deceased dog, a Dachs-hund named "Heine." A number of these acquaintances flowered into international collaborative investigations among friends in later years.

In 1983 Wally and May decided at the age of 70 that it was time to leave Carville and enjoy retirement in the place where they had met and married. They moved back to Seattle. Wally enrolled in finance courses at the University. He had hip surgery and they spent his recovery in Tahiti. From all reports they enjoyed themselves until age took its inevitable toll on them both.

I worked with Wally Kirchheimer for almost 20 years, and I worked for him for 12 of those years. He was a meticulous scientist and a patient teacher. We have missed him since his retirement, and we will miss him now that he has left this world. The world is a better place because of what he did in this life. Nobody can ask more than that.

May you rest in peace, Wally.

—Robert C. Hastings