

IN MEMORIAM

A Tribute to Aristotle Katsas



Aristotle Katsas

On the 10th of December 2009, Aristotle Katsas, a revered and well-loved colleague and mentor, reached the end of his life's journey. Born in Athens in 1932, son of Gregory Katsas, a Professor of Forensic Medicine, he developed a well-rounded and multifaceted character that would serve to enrich Hellenic Surgery. He graduated in 1950 from Varvakeio Model School and came first among 1300 successful entrants for the University of Athens Medical School; the first indication of a brilliant career that was to follow. After his graduation in 1957, he set off for the USA to specialize in General Surgery. As we know, during the decade of the 60s, the American hospitals were hotbeds of immense scientific rivalry and discovery that pioneered most of the great historical developments that would subsequently emerge in surgery. During the six years of his specialization, he served at various hospitals including Baltimore City Hospital, an affiliated member of Johns Hopkins Health System, Mary Fletcher Hospital and also at a hospital of Downstate University Medical School. He completed postgraduate studies in General Surgery as well as in Orthopedics, Thoracic Surgery and Trauma Plastic Surgery. Not only was he honoured with Fellowship of the American Board of Surgery and American College of Surgeons, but he was also awarded the rare distinction of Fellow of the New York Academy of Sciences.

After his return to Greece in September 1963, he was appointed as Registrar to the 3rd Surgical Clinic at Evagelismos Hospital. He grew to deeply care for this hospital which he faithfully served for 36 years, right up to his retirement in 1999. In December 1982, he undertook the management of the 2nd Surgical Clinic and from October 1989 to the end of 1999 he served as Director of the 1st Surgical Clinic. In 1982, he was elected as associate specialist in Endocrine Gland Surgery at the 2nd Surgical Propaedeutic Clinic of the University of Thessaloniki. Later, in 1987, he was deemed the leading candidate for the post of Professor at the University of Crete, (a position that finally, he did not accept). He lectured in Surgery at the Higher School of Nursing at Evagelismos Hospital from 1970-1984 to a total of 25 classes of students. During his many years of service at the hospital, he was distinguished for his dedication to patients and also for teaching both a large number of doctors who trained beside him and nursing students. His active and successful involvement in all the hospital's committees, whether administrative or scientific, included becoming a member of the Editorial Committee of the Journal "Nosokomeiaka Chronica" and the hospital's Library Committee and General Secretary of Evagelismos Scientific Society. He was also involved in similar activities for the Ministry of Health, such as serving as member of: the Auditing Committee in 1980, for the Medical Training Programmes at hospitals; the Committee for the Evaluation of Research Programmes in 1981; the Training Committee of Central Health Board in 1985; the 17th Board for the Assessment and Selection of Hospital Medical Staff, evaluating Directors of Surgery in 2000; the National Committee of the Attica Periphery Health Systems in 2001; the National Committee of Ethics for Clinical Research (National Organization for Medicines) from 2005-2006 and several other committees.

Particular mention should be made of his great contribution to the Society of

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Hellenic Surgery, whose Scientific Conferences he attended unflinchingly, initially at the small Amphitheatre at Evagelismos, presided by historical and distinguished Chairmen, and up to just a few months ago as a member of its Board of Directors. He served as General Secretary of the Society of Hellenic Surgery from 1986-1991 and as a member of the Board during the two terms 2004-2006 and 2006-2008. His regular participation in all the Society's events was accompanied by a plethora of presentations at its Meetings and Conferences. Special reference should be made to two laborious tasks that he volunteered to undertake: a) the indexing and classification of all articles published in the Society of Hellenic Surgery Journal during the period 1959-1983 and b) the organization of its Yearbook, as published in a special edition of the Journal on 31st December, 2008.

All those who knew him and worked with him, remember him as a person who treated others with utmost respect and ethos, whose interventions as a member of various committees was exceptionally constructive, fundamental and timely. In the words of the leading lecturer of medicine, Prof. Constantine Gardicas, Aristotle Katsas had "...crystal-clear rational, profound discretion, the rare intellectual charisma to produce ideas and the gift of simplifying problems and identifying their core". He was also a member of other societies, among which was the Hellenic Society of Endocrine Gland Surgery which he served as Chairman from 2001-2003. The field he showed unparalleled zeal for was that of Bioethics. Founding member of Hellenic Medical Ethos and Ethics in 1986, he went on to prove himself one of its most active members. Testimony to his efforts is the founding of the first State Hospital Ethos and Ethics Committee at Evagelismos.

Beyond the excellence of his achievements, he is remembered for his impeccable behaviour towards colleagues, young and old, and particularly towards the nursing staff of the hospital. Special emphasis must also be placed on his unflinching wise and accurate assessment of all the factors implicated in the many difficulties he encountered throughout his career and his tireless efforts to conciliate and avert overreaction. Serving on almost all of the hospital's administration and scientific committees, he made many friends with whom he

shared a mutual esteem, particularly with his subordinates, and never hesitated to shoulder his responsibilities with strict self-criticism and constructive judgement. He was recognized by all the hospital staff for these rare qualities and his propitious and just decisions. It was typical of his character to search for the positive side of a problem and seek to defuse tension, armed simply with regard for those involved and his innate sense of humour.

His family roots and endless study of the philosophy of life helped shape his versatile and complete personality. He was fortunate to have a happy family, an exceptional wife and companion, Haris Katsas, and two outstanding children, Gregory and Helen, who gave him four grandchildren whom he doted on. His family's support throughout his personal life and career are a shining example to all. We should emphasize his unflinching commitment to all issues raised by Bioethics and, most particularly, the question of euthanasia and the atrocities of violence. An advocate to the end for man's right to dignity, with deep Christian roots, he steadily preserved the principles of Hippocratic Medicine and the respect owed by all to the sacred and unique profile of the sick.

I remember how particularly moved I was by his vigorous desire not to suffer the discomfort of advanced medical technology towards the end; it appears his wish was granted as his death was painless and he felt little discomfort. His first stroke had already prepared him for death and he faced it with optimism and bravery.

For ten years after his retirement, every time he visited his second home, Evagelismos Hospital, he was given the ultimate accolade that can be bestowed upon a servant of medicine: the entire staff would rise to greet him and warmly welcome him with genuine joy. Today, unfortunately, we must bid a fond farewell to our honourable Director on his final journey.

May he Rest in Peace.

Spiros Drakopoulos, MD
Director of the 1st Department of Surgery,
Organ Transplant Unit
General State Hospital "Evagelismos"