

In Memoriam:

Prof. Dr. med. Reinhold E. Schmidt (1951 -2022)

Obituary by Torsten Witte

Following his training as an internist and rheumatologist in Bonn and London (Royal Hammersmith) and his post-doctoral period at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute at Harvard University in Boston, Reinhold Schmidt became a senior physician in the Department of Clinical Immunology at Hannover Medical School (MHH) in 1986. He set up his own research group focussing on NK cells and the role of Fc receptors. Fascinated by his seminars and his research work, I became one of his first doctoral students.

Working with him was challenging because he expected maximum effort. On the other hand, he was also a source of ideas, bursting with creativity, and above all he was full of unbridled activity and joie de vivre. He invited people to many private meetings, was on the dance floor at congresses until the end of the music, and even before important lectures he did not let himself be deterred from ending the day with long discussions into the early hours of the morning, enriched by humour and loud laughter. He had incredible stamina. Whilst some people, hungover at breakfast, tried to open their eyes by drinking lots of coffee, he came back from his morning jogging session beaming and joking. He retained his enthusiasm for sport, especially running and rowing, even after he took over the management of the clinic in 1995. Company outings for clinic employees were unimaginable without sporting activities. Even after his retirement, Reinhold still outran some of the younger employees.

As clinic director, he had a passion for establishing immunology as an independent discipline in medicine. He successfully fought for this for decades and made a significant contribution to the establishment of the DGfI specialist immunologist and, more recently, the additional immunology training programme for medical specialists. Reinhold has celebrated many other realisations of his visions, including the founding of the Hannover Biomedical Research School (HBRS) as an institution in which all PhD programmes at the MHH are supervised and of which he was the first Dean. The promotion of young researchers was an important concern of his. He promoted researching physicians in his own clinic and organised the Translational Immunology School (TIS), among other things. In the clinic, he emphasised research into primary and secondary immunodeficiency and the role of Fc receptors in the pathophysiology of autoimmune diseases. He was also committed to deepening existing specialisations such as collagenoses and vasculitides.

In addition to his irrepressible commitment, he was characterised by his great perseverance and tolerance of frustration. He firmly believed that anything could be achieved with a personal approach. If an interlocutor from whom he needed an important commitment rejected his request five times, Reinhold would speak or call the interlocutor a sixth time.

Reinhold was unwavering when he stood up for things he was convinced of. These included the fact that the focus of medical and nursing work should be on interaction with patients. He bluntly rejected superfluous documentation and administrative activities. He always struck a balance between compliance, practicality and experience, without fear of overstepping boundaries, but always with the intention of achieving the best possible result. In the end, however, we always admired his open advocacy of patient-centred medicine.

I will always remember Reinhold Schmidt as a colourful, multi-faceted and fascinating personality who achieved outstanding things for clinical immunology. I personally thank him for teaching me that there is something valuable in every person that can be recognised through communication. His infectious and cheerful attitude to life will be irreplaceable.