

Bern, March 04, 2020

PROFESSOR ARON GOLDBIRSCH

The Swiss Group for Clinical Cancer Research (SAKK) is deeply saddened to learn of the death of Professor Aron Goldhirsch on February 26, 2020 at the age of 73. SAKK will remember him with affection and profound respect.

Aron Goldhirsch grew up in Israel and studied at the University of Milan between 1968 and 1972. His academic path led him to Switzerland in 1973, where he became a junior physician at Beata Vergine Hospital in Mendrisio, after which he went on to work at Inselspital in Bern and San Giovanni hospital in Bellinzona.

His enthusiasm for cross-discipline, cross-border networking as a tool for conducting large-scale international trial projects remained with him all his life: he had been quicker than other people to recognize that this is the only way for innovation to be integrated into standard treatment and delivered to patients within a beneficial timeframe. In addition to his work as a senior physician at the Institute of Oncology in Bern, he was passionately involved in coordinating international breast cancer research studies, partly as a co-founder of the International Breast Cancer Study Group (IBCSG) and Co-Chair of the Group's Scientific Committee, but also as a founder member and the longstanding deputy chair of the Breast International Group (BIG), a worldwide consortium of collaborative groups dedicated to breast cancer research.

He was awarded the Professor's chair at Bern University Hospital in 1985. While still working at Inselspital Bern, he collaborated closely for research purposes with the Department of Biostatistics at Harvard School of Public Health and Harvard Medical School in Boston.

From 1988 to 1994, Prof. Goldhirsch was Chair of the Oncology Department in Bellinzona. The Oncology Institute of Southern Switzerland (IOSI) was founded in 1994. From 1994 to 2011, he was Head of Medical Oncology at IOSI, where he continued to advocate networking between the various sites. In addition, he was President of the Swiss Group for Clinical Cancer Research (SAKK) from 1994 to 2004 and – in keeping with his character – brought fresh impetus to the organization. In so doing he consistently gave priority to resolving scientific issues, addressing patient interests and delivering maximum quality. In all the roles he occupied this came as second nature to him, since he placed the same demands on himself. Everyone who attended project group meetings or worked on the Research Council with him benefited from his extraordinary knowledge and found him to be a gifted teacher.

From 1996 to 2004, he guested as an Extraordinary Professor at Harvard Medical School's Faculty of Medicine. His scientific and academic profile was strongly influenced by his close collaboration with the Dana–Farber Cancer Institute.

Since 1997 he has held various positions at the European Institute of Oncology (IEO) in Milan, including Director of the Department of Medicine and Deputy Scientific Director.

Prof. Goldhirsch received several international awards, including the Swiss Cancer League's Robert Wenner prize; the San Salvatore prize; the City of Milan's "La Madonnina" international research prize; the German Oncology Group's Farmitalia prize; and the Swiss Lavezzari prize.

The University of Gothenburg awarded him an honorary doctorate in 1993. In December 2008, the Susan G. Komen foundation chose him and Prof. Richard Gelber to receive its Cure Brinker Award for Scientific Distinction, while in 2010 he received the Umberto Veronesi prize for his dedication to the fight against breast cancer. He and Prof. Richard Gelber were awarded the 2011 ECCO Clinical Research Award, and he became the recipient of the St. Gallen breast cancer prize in 2013.

Professor Goldhirsch authored 671 peer-reviewed articles and reference book chapters, was the publisher or co-publisher of ten books, and sat on the editorial boards of several oncology and breast cancer research journals.

In Aron Goldhirsch, SAKK has lost a truly great scientist, researcher, teacher, doctor and human being. All those who held him in affection have lost a loyal friend and companion.



Prof. Dr. med. Roger von Moos,
SAKK President



PD Dr. Martin Reist,
SAKK CEO



Prof. Dr. med. Beat Thürlimann,
SAKK Past President