

| Professor Izzettin Baris - A Personal View

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Professor Y. Izzetin Baris was an excellent doctor and a world-renowned researcher in lung diseases, especially asbestos-related ones. I am very proud to be able to say that he was also a very old and good friend of mine.

After medical school and military service, he joined the Hacettepe University at the Department of Chest Medicine in 1969, where he started his research on asbestos-related diseases. His findings in the various villages of calcified plaques and mesotheliomas were published first in Turkish medical papers and then in international ones. In 1981, his study on erionite-related diseases in the village of Karain was published in one of the oldest and most famous of all the large medical papers, namely Lancet. His studies on environmental asbestos exposures were ground-breaking and resulted in similar findings in many parts of the world - Greece, Italy, New Caledonia, China, Australia, just to mention some of the more important ones.

He was thus a big name in the scientific world and his research in Turkey was all the time increasing. In 1980, I defended my dissertation on pleural plaques and asbestos in Sweden, and I sent a copy to all then well-known and famous asbestos researchers in the world. I got a friendly thank you from about half of them, a few wrote some encouraging words-but the world-famous professor Baris wrote a long letter and invited me to come to Turkey. Once I came to know him, I realized how typical of him this was-so positive, generous and interested in all other people. In 1981 he welcomed me in Ankara and drove me out to the villages with one of his sons. It was one of my most memorable trips.

Apart from being a great researcher, one of his greatest qualities was his ability to become friendly with and talk to anyone,

even the poorest and most un-educated villager, and his great empathy. I was very impressed by this and it was evident that he was most welcome and appreciated by everyone everywhere in those early days. In fact, during his research in the villages he treated not only the lung diseases but also took care of many small other ailments. We had long discussions on asbestos problems and I am very proud to actually have published some papers together with him.

His main interest in the scientific studies was not to publish his findings and become a famous scientist, but rather to try to help the villagers in their terrible problems. The world-wide interest in the studies he used as important arguments in his discussions with politicians and at least one village he managed to have moved to a safer spot, and the knowledge of the risks with white-washing houses or using erionite-containing rocks as a building material has certainly prevented a number of mesotheliomas. It is very sad that in the later years, he was accused of only doing studies to make money and become famous without any thoughts of the patients

- indeed, nothing could be further from the truth.

Another cooperation between Sweden and Turkey was a number of pupils to Baris, which we had the pleasure of seeing in Sweden for a longer or shorter time. You all know Fuat Kalyoncu, Mustafa Özesmi, and Muzaffer Metintas. They have contributed to both Swedish and Turkish



Professor Baris driving the car, which was given to him for research by UN, 1981.



Discussion with villagers. To the extreme right, Gunnar Hillerdal, and at his side making notices is Professor Baris. 1996.



Professor Baris's map of Karain, 1981. Every red dot is one case of mesothelioma.

pulmonary science and have participated in the remarkable progress of our speciality over the decades. Professor Baris was also very active in the Turkish Thoracic Society, so his contribution to this speciality in Turkey has been very important.

But professor Baris was also a great internationalist and he wanted to cooperate over all borders and had many international contacts. One of his achievements was the cooperation with the Greek pulmonary society. He felt that the animosity which unfortunately still occurs in some places between these two countries was most unhappy, and he invited the Greek professor Constantoupuolos to a Turkish meeting. Both Izzet and I were once invited to a meeting in Thessaloniki, where we together visited the birth-house of Kemal Ataturk.

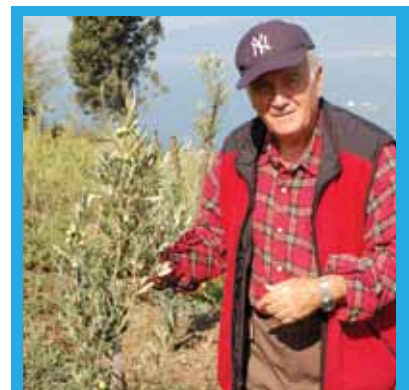
After his retirement he still worked as a doctor and every now and then we consulted each other over difficult cases. However, he spent more and more time with his garden and obviously enjoyed this.

I have had the pleasure to visit again and again Turkey and at



In the birth-house of Kemal Ataturk, Thessaloniki, Greece 1997.

most occasions I have met with Izzet, and every time was always as pleasant. The last time I saw him was in 2011, in Eskisehir at a mesothelioma meeting, and in Ankara in November the same year. He was the same wonderful man inside even if the outside was a little aged, and I had no idea that we should soon lose him forever. It is a great loss for Turkish science, but his legacy in Turkey and the world will last.



Professor Baris in his garden, 2006.