OBITUARY

One of the world’s leading epidemiologists, Professor Emeritus Olav Axelson, MD, died suddenly on 1 March after a short illness. He was 66 years old. Olav Axelson was born in Alingsås, Sweden, on 1 May 1937. He received his medical training in Gothenburg, Sweden and worked for a number of years as a physician in internal medicine at Skövde General Hospital. In 1969, he joined a newly established Clinic of Occupational Medicine in Örebro, Sweden, where he also started his research career by doing the first Swedish epidemiological study on the association between radon exposure in mines and lung cancer in the population of miners.

Epidemiological methods in occupational and environmental medicine became the area of research and teaching that occupied him for the rest of his career. In 1977, he moved to the University Hospital in Linköping where he became the first Professor in Occupational Medicine in Sweden. Along with his academic work he also founded the Clinic of Occupational Medicine in Linköping in 1978. He continued research on radon exposure and in 1979, he published a report on his groundbreaking study on health effects of radon exposure in homes. During his career, he continuously studied health effects of exposure to radon, background radiation, solvents and pesticides, but he was primarily involved in almost all areas of occupational epidemiology. Theoretical epidemiology was another field of great interest to him and one to which he made some very important methodological contributions.

Professor Axelson was the author and co-author of more than 300 articles and book chapters. He was also a promoter of 20 doctoral dissertations. Some of those Doctors of Medicine are from Italy, a country that was very important to him and where he won very high respect for his scientific achievements and exceptional personality. In 1985, Professor Axelson became a fellow of the Collegium Ramazzini in Italy. Just few months ago in October 2003, he participated in the Annual Ramazzini Days Capri, Italy and received the Ramazzini Award in recognition of his scientific accomplishments. He collaborated with numerous researchers in different disciplines from all over the world and his methodological skills earned him international recognition. He was a member of many World Health Organization (WHO) working groups and a contributor to eight WHO monographs. He served as an expert in many advisory committees and as a reviewer for several international journals. He was also a member of critical research funding committees. All those activities were marked by his magnificent contributions.

Even though he retired in 2002, Olav Axelson continued his work at the Departments of Occupational Medicine in both Linköping and Örebro. He was a brilliant scientist and a man of great integrity. His sharp intelligence and vast knowledge together with great wisdom and pursuit of social justice characterized his lifetime achievements. He will be deeply missed by the international community of researchers in the area of occupational and environmental epidemiology.

The Editors of the International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health wish to express their deep sorrow over the death of Professor Olav Axelson, a man whose work and personality will long be remembered by his colleagues – members of the International Contributing Board.

Editors

To honour Professor Olav Axelson, a fund in his name has been established at Linköping University, Sweden and any contribution will be highly appreciated.