Nils Retterstøl in Memoriam (1924–2008)

On February 9, 2008, Professor emeritus Nils Retterstøl died suddenly at home. He was active until his last moment, continued his clinical work, and had just completed his 50th book when he passed away. As a scientist he had an international reputation. Because, as a therapist, the well-being of his patients was paramount, the focus of his research was, first and foremost, clinical. He conducted clinical and follow-up studies of attempted suicide. Perhaps his greatest contribution was his investigation of delusional psychoses: his doctoral thesis on paranoid and paranoiac psychosis, first published in 1966, is classic in this field, and the 22- to 39-year follow-up is another unique and enduring contribution.

Nils was born in Oslo, where he graduated from medical school in 1950. He completed his psychiatric training in 1963, and 4 years later became Associate Professor in Oslo under his mentor Gabriel Langfeldt. From 1969 to 1972, he held the Chair at the University of Bergen, and was Director of the large Neevengården Mental Hospital. From 1973 until his retirement in 1994, he was Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Oslo, and Head of Gaustad Hospital. He changed both mental hospitals from old fashioned asylums to modern open-minded and democratic therapeutic centres.

From 1981 to 1992, he was Editor of European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences, and he served on advisory boards and as co-editor of several journals, including *Psychopathology*. He became a Honorary Member of AEP, IASP and the Swedish Psychiatric Association. In the Nordic countries he took several initiatives to coordinate research in suicidology, and participated for many years in the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP), holding the presidency from 1989 to 1991. He was for many years an important contributor to the Sections of Clinical Psychopathology in the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) and the Association of European Psychiatrists (AEP).

As an early board member of the AEP, he took active part in building up a strong European organisation. As clinical scientist, he was interested in updated and clinically meaningful definitions of schizophrenia and paranoia. The 80th birthdays of Nils Retterstøl and Peter Berner were celebrated at the AEP Psychopathology Symposium in Paris (2004), where the topic was 'Schizophrenia and Paranoia: Historical and Updated Contributions'. He was universally respected on the international scene. With his command of English and German, and also French, he was much sought as a lecturer. He is a sad loss to the world psychiatric community.

In his home country, Nils became a well-known and very much appreciated figure through the media, especially through television programmes, where he succeeded in making psychiatric disorders generally understood – illnesses that could happen to anyone. He drew attention to the small size of the budgets for mental health services, when compared to somatic health care, and had the ear of the authorities: there were visible improvements in general psychiatric services, and especially substance abuse. Through his initiatives, Norway became one of the first countries with a national plan for suicide prevention.

Nils often returned to his roots at his Herefoss farm, which has been in the family since 1570; fishing and elk hunting were among his occasional pursuits. He was a wonderful friend, and the hospitality which he and Kirsten gave is unforgettable. He was popular, both with his Norwegian colleagues, and with those from other countries. His knowledge, wisdom and enthusiasm made him an inspiring teacher and mentor. He radiated courtesy, concern, sympathetic interest and understanding, good-heartedness, tact, trustworthiness, dignity, diligence, rectitude, warmth and humanity – a complete psychiatrist and scientist, and a complete man.

Professor Stein Opjordsmoen, Oslo

Professor emeritus Ian Brockington, Birmingham