Professor Andrea Prader

On the Occasion of His 75th Birthday

M.M.	Milo	Zachmann
A.	Andreas	Fanconi
W.	Wolfgang	Sippell

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On December 23, 1994, Professor Andrea Prader, Chairman emeritus of the Department of Paediatrics at the University of Zürich, eminent paediatric endocrinologist, and founder of the European Society for Paediatric Endocrinology (ESPE) will be celebrating his 75th birthday.

Although his active and formerly sometimes slightly impatient ways have mellowed, and although recently he has occasionally complained of forgetting a few things (e.g. the name of a former patient, but never anything important), his sharp intellect and critical mind are still at least equal, and often enough superior, to those of many of his colleagues decades younger. His curriculum and achievements have been highlighted many times (see e.g. Professor Wiedemann's remarks on the occasion of his 65th birthday, Eur J Pediatr 1984; 143:80-81), and we will not reiterate all the honorary memberships and degrees he has accumulated during his awesome career.

All these important and well-deserved honours are, however, not as impressive as his personality in everyday life: in spite of a tremendous workload, he never had the slightest difficulty in separating the important from the unimportant, the bluff from the real thing, and meaningless chatter from useful statements. With his clairvoyance, he always was a fair arbiter and a mentor in the true sense of the word, not only with respect to medical but also to human problems.

Those who had the privilege of working with him, first as pupils, then as associates and later as friends, experienced that he never criticized anybody simply out of a position of power, but always in a constructive spirit. His criticism of a draft of a paper, for example, was never personal, but always in the pure interest of improvement.

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Not the position of a person was important to him, but whether or not what he or she had to say made sense. Not rigid hierarchic structures impressed him, but an open mind and a good idea. Whether such an idea originated in the brain of an older professor or in that of the

youngest student was of no importance to him. Because of this attitude in addition to his tremendous knowledge, he was regarded as one of the very few truly 'modern' Chairmen of Paediatrics in Europe by many, especially by those returning from the United States who had seen that some of the European structures needed revision. Even his gracious way of stepping down at retirement was 'modern': although his advice is still often sought and highly valued, he would never think of giving it unasked.

His interest in and profound knowledge of the world of the arts did not develop only after his retirement, but accompanied him during all his active life. A creative scientist himself, he has always been open to the creativity of others in other fields. This interest shows that Andrea Prader is not only a man of high intellect but also of deep emotions. The first aspect is evident to anybody after a conversation of only a few minutes. The second has always been more hidden, but those who saw patients with him, heard him discuss ethical problems, or in later years heard him talk about his grandchildren, know about it. In the same way his discreet and fine sense of humour, more similar to that of an Englishman than of a regular Swiss, becomes evident to those who know him more closely.

Many photographs have been made of Andrea Prader looking serious as a lecturer, discussant, or recipient of an award. Since he no longer has to worry about running a large department or about churning out lectures and scientific papers, we think it is now more appropriate to show him with a broad smile. It is the picture of a happy and lucky man, who can look back with pride on an extremely successful and rich professional and private life. In the name of his former collaborators at the Kispi (as the Kinderspital is lovingly called by insiders) and of the Council and all members of the ESPE, who owe their founder much for his inspiration and continued support, we congratulate Andrea Prader and wish him many years of good health and happiness in the company of his caring wife, family, friends, and colleagues from all over the world.