The Johann Jacob Wepfer Award 2012 of the European Stroke Conference to Professor Louis R. Caplan

Johann Jacob Wepfer [1]

The 17th century was an exciting time, when scientists and their scholars had matured enough to leave the doctrines of Hippocrates and Galen behind them, ready to reach out for new horizons. At this time, some years before Thomas Willis described the arterial circle at the base of the brain, Johann Jacob Wepfer (1620–1695) from Schaffhausen collected neurological histories, conducted dissections and autopsies, correlated clinical and postmortem findings and gave an accurate description of the anatomy of the vessels of the brain including the Circulus arteriosus [2]. He observed both ischemia and hemorrhage in people who had been carried off by apoplexy.

The Johann Jacob Wepfer Award of the ESC

The Johann Jacob Wepfer award both commemorates the milestone Wepfer laid to pave the way for modern stroke medicine and to pay homage to our eminent contemporary stroke professors. This year’s laureate is Professor Louis R. Caplan from Boston. Since the beginnings of the European Stroke Conference (ESC), Dr. Caplan has actively contributed to turning the ESC into a lively stroke forum.

The 2012 Laureate: Professor Louis R. Caplan from Boston

Professor Louis R. Caplan was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on New Year’s Eve, 1936. He graduated from Williams College, Massachusetts, and the University of Maryland Medical School. From 1962 to 1964, he was an intern and junior resident in medicine at the Boston City Hospital under the guidance of Professor Derek Denny-Brown (1901–1981), and he completed his neurology residency at the Harvard Neurological Unit at the same hospital in 1969. From 1969 to 1970, he was a Cerebrovascular Disease Fellow at the Massachusetts General Hospital in the golden era of Raymond Adams (1911–2008) and Charles Miller-Fisher (1913–2012). Caplan joined the Department of Neurology at Boston’s Beth Israel Hospital in 1970, and he moved to Chicago in 1978 to become neurologist-in-chief at the Michael Reese Hospital and Professor of Neurology at the University of Chicago. In 1984, he returned to New England to become chairman of the Department of Neurology at the New England Medical Center and a professor at Tufts Medical School. In 1998, he returned to the Beth Israel Hospital, that is today part of the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC). He is still active there as a senior neurologist and is Professor of Neurology at the Harvard Medical School.

Professor Charles Miller-Fisher was probably his most influential teacher. If Caplan’s interest in general neurology and stroke medicine had not already been kindled by Denny-Brown, Miller-Fisher did it definitely. As an astute observer of clinical manifestations and anatomy, a skillful researcher and talented teacher, Louis Caplan is the author of more than 600 original articles and reviews. He has also written or edited 35 books. He often starts on an historical note, illustrating the development of wisdom in a given field to build on the scientific foundations of our ancestors and teachers. This demonstrates his love for history, which he first proved when, as a premed student at Williams College, he majored in history and received the Williams College history prize. Louis Caplan has served on numerous committees and editorial boards. He is a former chairman of the Stroke Council of the American Heart Asso-
cation, and has trained 30 American and 28 international fellows.

Looking up Louis R. Caplan on the ISI Web of Science you will find more than 15,000 citations, an average of 30 citations per item and 66 articles that have been quoted at least 66 times (i.e. an h-index of 66), an achievement which indicates his influence on the development of clinical neurology and stroke medicine and his worldwide effect as a teacher.

When there was still a debate on the usefulness of computers in the field of medicine, Louis R. Caplan and Jay P. Mohr initiated the first registry for any disease, the prospective Harvard Cooperative Stroke Registry [3]. Other registries followed, such as the NINDS Stroke Data Bank and the New England Medical Center Posterior Circulation Registry for clarifying the manifold manifestations and the course of stroke. These registries and his daily practice were abundant sources for outstanding clinical neurological studies on syndromes, signs and new conditions and clarifications of clinical entities and pathophysiological concepts [4, 5]. He provided some of the first descriptions of dissections, he revisited Binswanger’s disease, coined the term ‘top of basilar syndrome’, and was among the group that drew attention to posterior reversible encephalopathy [6–8]. In Caplan’s thinking, the posterior circulation always had a special place.

Among his many books I name only three of my favorites. The first carries a somewhat immodest title: Caplan’s Stroke. A Clinical Approach (4th edition, Elsevier, 2009). This title was given by the publisher and in no way reflects Caplan’s humble character; earlier editions were simply entitled ‘Stroke’. Caplan’s Stroke is mandatory reading for every neurology resident. The second book The Effective Clinical Neurologist written by Louis R. Caplan and Joshua Hollander (3rd edition, McGraw Hill, 2011) is one of the rare gems that teaches how to approach a patient, how to achieve a good doctor-patient relationship and how to improve in- and out-patient care in various settings. The third book Posterior Circulation Disease. Clinical Findings, Diagnosis and Management (Blackwell Science, 1996) reflects his ability to ally clinical observation, the historical evolution of science, clinicopathological observations and findings from modern techniques. Though almost two decades old, it is still relevant and is a classic text for neurologists who are interested in posterior circulation disease.

Dr. Caplan is an eminent physician and cares for many prominent patients, but he is also concerned about what is wrong with Mr. Jones [9]. He not only teaches a good doctor-patient relationship, he also lives it. When my daughter was a medical student at the BIDMC, she had the privilege of seeing him with his patients. Her comment was ‘Lou is extremely kind and understanding to his patients. They just love and adore him’. What better compliment can you get as a doctor?

Professor Caplan has many friends all over the world – this naturally reflects his open mind and heart. It is always a joy to spend time with him, be it when he is teaching at the bedside, enjoying a dinner or a beer or a glass of wine; some have the privilege of playing a game of tennis with him or visiting Fenway Park to support the Boston Red Sox team. He is also ready to go a long way for his friends. When Marie-Germaine Bousser stepped down as chairwoman at Larmoriboisier and a surprise party was given, Lou didn’t mind crossing the Atlantic to honor her.

Louis Caplan has been married to Brenda for almost 50 years. She supported him over the decades and gave him the freedom to pursue his successful career and professional life. They have six wonderful children and a growing number of joyful grandchildren. The wisdom that beside every strong man stands a strong woman has proved to be true in the Caplan family, and Brenda also deserves part of Lou’s success.

The European Stroke Community thanks Louis R. Caplan for all his contributions and teachings to stroke medicine and congratulates him for the 2012 Johann Jacob Wepfer Award.

Heinrich P. Matte
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References
9 Caplan LR: TIA:s: we need to return to the question, 'What is wrong with Mr. Jones?’ Neurology 1988;38:791–793.