Vinko Kambič 1920–2001

On November 24, 2001, at the age of 81, Vinko Kambič, MD, PhD, Professor Emeritus of Otolaryngology at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ljubljana, former Chairman of the Department of Otorhinolaryngology and Cervicofacial Surgery of the University Medical Center in Ljubljana, and member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, unexpectedly passed away.

Kambič was one of the world's top authorities in the field of reconstructive surgery of the head and neck and one of the last towering personalities in Slovenian medicine. He achieved a significant international reputation through his comprehensive surgical and scientific career on laryngeal cancer. It is therefore not surprising that Hugh F. Biller, in his editorial 'Joseph Ogura Memorial Lecture' [Laryngoscope 1987;97:38–41], proclaimed him, together with another fifteen laryngologists, to be one of the most distinguished surgeons in the field of reconstructive laryngeal surgery.

His introduction of the H-incision for radical neck dissection is now a generally accepted method, ranking among nine classically used incisions of the neck skin resulting in arterial supply preservation. A modification of epiglottoplasty after vertical hemilaryngectomy, known as Sedlacek-Kambič-Tucker epiglottisplasty, is his original contribution to laryngeal conservation surgery used throughout the world. Kambič was among the first in the world to introduce microlaryngoscopy using instruments of his own design that also enabled first class photography of laryngeal lesions. A major part of his work had been devoted to the treatment of laryngeal stenoses and laryngeal traumatic lesions of all varieties but particularly those after anesthesia.

Over a professional career of 40 years, Kambič enthusiastically supported the idea of interdisciplinary collaboration between basic sciences, particularly pathology, and surgical skills, leading him to progress in research of laryngeal cancerogenesis. With the pathologist, Prof. Ivan Lenart, in 1971 he developed an original histologic grading system of epithelial hyperplastic laryngeal lesions (EHLL), which was devised to cater to specific laryngeal issues. The Ljubljana classification of EHLL, now further supplemented by a working group on EHLL of the European Society of Pathology in 1999, established on the initiative of Kambič, has been found to be more precise for daily diagnostic work than other grading systems and provides data closely correlated to the biological behavior of the lesions. Much of his knowledge of EHLL is brought together in his monograph *Epithelial Hyperplastic Lesions of the Larynx* (1995).

In 1996, he organized an International Conference on Epithelial Hyperplastic Lesions of the Larynx in Ljubljana, at which numerous questions of laryngeal precancerous lesions were discussed in a multidisciplinary setting. Selected contributions from this conference were published in *Acta Oto-Laryngologica*, Supplement 527, edited by Kambič in 1997. All these have significantly contributed to the worldwide recognition of Kambič's worth in his successful work on problems of EHLL.

In Kambič's pure research work, he studied the etiology of laryngeal cancer. He was the first to describe the influence of sex hormones in the development of EHLL and laryngeal cancer. He studied the influence of smoking and alcohol abuse on the pharyngeal and laryngeal mucosa, which was also proved in animal experiments. His

contribution to understanding the influence of asbestos on the laryngeal mucosa, published as the chapter 'Laryngeal Asbestosis' of *International Asbestos Medical Research* (1991), was a pioneering work.

He published more than 300 scientific and other papers in different scientific and medical journals and he gave approximately the same number of presentations at international congresses and meetings, often as an invited speaker. He was a member of the Editorial Board of *Oncology*, an active member of many professional societies, and was awarded the highest honors of the state for his internationally recognized professional achievements.

Kambič had an extremely prolific academic career. He was untiring in his search for new routes and fruitful directions based on his wide knowledge and the profes-

sional commitment of himself and his collaborators. Despite his age, he was a highly respected and leading authority in current research work on laryngeal carcinogenesis in Slovenia. Although professional activity occupied the center of his intellectual sphere, the fine arts and literature were also indispensable foci. Just one day before his passing, he successfully established the Kambič gallery of paintings in his native house in Bela Krajina, the southeast of Slovenia, and donated it to the Metlika Commune and, thus, made his last heartfelt wish a reality.

Professor Kambič will be missed, but his outstanding personality and many scientific contributions will be a source of memory and inspiration for his friends and collaborators.

Nina Gale