

# Remembering Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, MD, PhD

By Anne-Simone Parent, MD, PhD, R. Thomas Zoeller, PhD, Vincent Geenen, MD, PhD, Barbara Demeneix, PhD, Niels E. Skakkebaek, MD, and Richard J. Santen, MD



Our mentor and colleague, professor Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, University of Liège, died January 30, 2019, less than two years after he was diagnosed with cancer, leaving a stark void in the world of international endocrinology.

Jean-Pierre was a pediatric endocrinologist and pioneer in translational research regarding the role the endocrine system has on the brain of children and young adults. His work helped advance the understanding of the hypothalamic control of puberty and led him to receive the 2014 Andrea Prader Prize, the most prestigious award given by the European Society for Pediatric Endocrinology.

In 1974, he received his MD from the University of Liège (Belgium), specializing in pediatric endocrinology. He obtained his higher education teaching certification from the University of Liège in 1984. His scientific career began under the mentorship of Paul Franchimont. Very early during his medical studies, he became interested in

neuroendocrinology and his essential scientific focus was the neuroendocrine control of puberty onset and pulsatility of GnRH neurons in the hypothalamic arcuate nucleus. He performed a research fellowship in Richard Santen's laboratory at Pennsylvania State University. Until his retirement in 2015, he was the head of the Developmental Neuroendocrinology Unit, GIGA-Neurosciences, Liège. The many graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and senior researchers who had the chance to work with him will remember his sharp scientific mind, his sense of humor, and his passion for science. He accompanied his collaborators with pedagogy and generosity throughout their development.

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Aside from his prominent role in this research field, Jean-Pierre was also an excellent clinician involved in the management of children with growth disorders and type 1 diabetes. Generous and conscious of the difficulties of young chronic patients, he shared with them his passion for hiking during several mountain treks, which became a tradition.

Another passion of Jean-Pierre's was transmitting knowledge. He initiated the implementation of problem-based learning in the Faculty of Medicine in 2000 and became head of the Institute of training and research in higher education at the University of Liège in

2011. His rare teaching and human qualities have led many of those he mentored to pursue their own rewarding careers in pediatric medicine and science.

He and his team were among the first to study the role of endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) on puberty onset and trends in puberty disorders. During the last years before his retirement as chief of pediatric endocrinology, Liege University, EDCs became a focus of his research group and made a significant impact around the world. His research background, which included both solid clinical and experimental expertise, helped the group to become an international leader in EDC research.

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Realizing the need to raise awareness about human environmental exposures to EDCs, Jean-Pierre decided that he needed to warn the public as well as various regulatory bodies of these dangers. Specifically, he felt he needed to emphasize the dangers of these compounds on the health and development of children and young adults.

In 2014, he was nominated as co-president of the Endocrine Society's Global Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals Policy Task Force. His contributions received considerable international momentum, leading to him receiving the [Endocrine Society's 2016 Outstanding Public Service Laureate Award](#) for Leaders Raising Global Awareness of the Health Effects of Endocrine-Disrupting Chemicals and was credited for playing a crucial role in "engaging the European community on EDC science and policy."

As he neared the end of his life, it was with great determination that he worked on his book that would inform everyday citizens about the dangers of endocrine disrupters. As he had done throughout his career, rather than taking the position of an omniscient expert, he sought to motivate others to reflect and ask more questions.

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*After learning of Dr. Bourguignon's passing, Richard Santen, MD, Endocrine Society past president, contributed his own unique perspective regarding Jean-Pierre Bourguignon:*

Jean-Pierre was a good man, one of the very best. I first met Jean-Pierre while on sabbatical leave in Liège, Belgium in 1978. Jean-Pierre was studying the pulsatile release of LH by the pituitary. He was years ahead of the field at that time in that he was thinking about this problem from the perspective of mechanisms rather than patterns. Most others in the field were only interested in pulse analysis as a descriptive means of characterizing patterns in various diseases involving reproductive function.

Because of interactions with Jean-Pierre in Liège, a plan was made that he would spend one year at the Penn State University School of Medicine in 1980 serving as the pediatric endocrinologist as Dr. Howard Kulin, the pediatric endocrinologist, was on sabbatical leave. Jean-Pierre excelled in this setting, seeing patients, teaching, and continuing his research. Very quickly the pediatric department recognized that he had extraordinary talent in the area of teaching and patient care and awarded him the annual teaching award, remarkable as English was his second language. As we practiced medicine together in clinic, I observed firsthand his expertise as a master pediatrician and endocrinologist, characterized by his empathy for patients and his scholarly understanding of complex clinical problems.

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Jean Pierre Bourguignon, MD, PhD, delivers a statement on behalf of the Society during the plenary of the International Conference on Chemicals Management in Geneva, Switzerland, in September 2015.

Over the last five years, as an officer of the Endocrine Society, I had the opportunity to interact extensively once more with Jean-Pierre. He had become interested in EDCs and became one of the world's experts in the study of these problematic compounds. He was appointed to co-lead a task force of the Endocrine Society and to give advice to multiple interest groups including the European Union on this controversial topic. From my perspective, he demonstrated the ability to present very complex information in a simple, straightforward, easily understood fashion and to provide precise data supporting both sides of complex arguments in order to provide well-balanced judgments. He quickly gained the trust and appreciation of Endocrine Society members for these activities.

Looking back on my interactions with Jean-Pierre, I was highly impressed with all of his personal and professional qualities. He was selfless in his dealings with others and always had an interest in the difficulties of others in navigating their lives. One cannot characterize all of his qualities in this brief document, but to me he was an impressive individual, the finest of men. These are my thoughts about a person that I have known for more than 40 years and who was an inspiration to all who had the good fortune to interact with him.

*By Anne-Simone Parent, MD, PhD, GIGA-Neurosciences, Pediatric Endocrinology, University of Liège, Belgium; R. Thomas Zoeller, Biology Department, University of Massachusetts Amherst; Vincent Geenen, MD, PhD, Belgian F.S.R., ULiège GIGA-I3, Immunoendocrinology; Barbara Demeneix, UMR 7221 Evolution des Régulations Endocriniennes, Muséum National D'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France; Niels E. Skakkebaek, MD, University Dept. Of Growth and Reproduction, Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen, Denmark; and Richard J. Santen, MD, Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism Department of Internal Medicine, University of Virginia Health Science System, Charlottesville, Virginia*