

Obituary

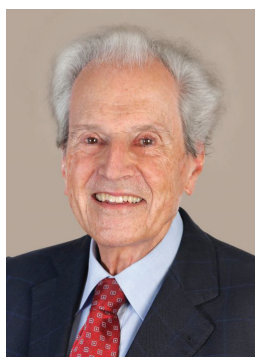
Remembering Professor Ugo Fisch

Thomas Linder 

Department of Otorhinolaryngology - Head & Neck Surgery, Luzerner Kantonsspital, Luzern, Switzerland

ORCID iD of the author: T.L. 0000-0001-5187-3010.

Cite this article as: Linder T. Remembering Professor Ugo Fisch. J Int Adv Otol 2020; 16(1): 1-2.



One of the greatest surgeons of our time, the main founder and mentor of modern otoneurology and lateral skull base microsurgery, the founder of the "International Fisch Microsurgery Foundation" (www.FIMF.ch), the winner of several medals and awards, the founding member and former Chairman of the European Academy of Otolaryngology and Neurotology (EAONO), honorary member of the Swiss ENT Association (SGORL), and former Director of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery at the University of Zürich, Professor Ugo Fisch passed away at his home in Erlenbach, Switzerland, on December 12, 2019. Born on March 3, 1931, he was 88 years old. On December 20, 2019, his family members and former friends held a farewell ceremony at the Protestant church near his hometown.

In his entire professional life, Ugo Fisch had studied all technical details of otology and lateral skull base surgery with the most advanced technical means at that time. His family confirmed that there was almost no single day, even on weekends or during vacations, that he did not spend time to make drawings for his books or papers, think of new ideas, or review papers written by him or staff members.

I personally remember the 10 days we spent with John May at his home in South of France editing the second edition of the Tympanoplasty Book, working 8-10 hours every day, and finishing all work in time.

After residency training under the guidance of Luzius Rüedi in Zürich, he performed research in Baltimore, visited the House Ear Institute in Los Angeles multiple times, and worked closely with Prof. Gazi Yasargil, the former chairman of neurosurgery in Zürich, and Prof. Anton Valavanis, the chairman of (interventional) neuroradiology in Zürich, to understand and appreciate the difficulties and challenges of advanced otology and how to approach intra- and extradural lesions at the skull base, which were previously considered inoperable or did have a high morbidity or even mortality. Establishing the concept of subtotal petrosectomy, in 1967, he resolved middle ear cleft as a potential danger to the subarachnoid space, as it has been mentioned by Charles Balance at the beginning of last century when dealing with cerebrospinal fluid leaks. He also developed new concepts on middle ear surgery, including tympanoplasty techniques, mastoidectomy, stapes surgery, and all types of ossiculoplasties and continuously evaluated and published his own results. He developed and improved more than 30 types of surgical instruments with excellent performance and specially designed for otology and lateral skull base surgery. He worked very closely with the first dental drill company (Bien-Air) and continuously improved the drills for temporal bone surgery. He collaborated with Swiss aerospace companies in the development of better balanced surgical microscopes, operating tables that roll smoothly with the head at their center, and surgeon's chair that easily moves by electric, not mechanical, force. Initially with Leibinger company and later in close collaboration with Storz and Kurz, he invented the Fisch series of ossicular prosthesis based on the characteristics of acoustic conduction and vibration. Due to its stable surgical results, repeatability, and safety, Fisch instruments and prostheses are still widely used by otolaryngologists and neurosurgeons worldwide. Some technical aspects may change over time with the development of minimal invasive techniques and advancement of equipment and instruments related to newer engineering technology. However, these new ideas have to stand the test to outperform the surgical philosophy contained in the Fisch philosophy and techniques and more than 300 articles.

Ugo Fisch established the Zürich temporal bone and lateral skull base surgery training courses approximately 30 years ago and invented the recording and presentation of 3D clinical and teaching videos at a time when almost no one was interested in 3D techniques for medical purpose. His idea was always to teach in small classes step by step, providing surgeons with guidelines,

manuscripts, and books with numerous drawings, highlighting every detail and ensuring that the tutors of his courses enthusiastically share their own experience and teach younger participants. He personally lectured 25 training courses before he handed them over to me. The colleagues who have participated in the courses were all touched by Professor Fisch's responsible attitude and work enthusiasm for 10 hours in a row. In 1998, he established the website www.fimf.ch, presented a large number of anatomical and clinical surgical videos free of charge, and discussed current clinical cases with members of the FIMF family. Thousands of physicians worldwide have received direct guidance from Professor Fisch, either during his active time at the University of Zürich, later in Luzern, or in an ongoing 3-month training fellowship in Luzern since 2005. Concurrently, FIMF training branches have been established in China, Brazil, the United States, South Africa, and other countries. All these efforts have greatly reduced the learning difficulties, making the Fisch Surgical Technique System a technology that can be mastered and repeated by ordinary physicians, regardless if they provide surgeries in well-developed or poorly equipped third-world countries.

After his retirement from the University, he joined Prof. Daniel Simmen and KD Hansruedi Briner at the Hirslanden-Center in Zürich and also collaborated with me in Luzern, seeking to help patients for many more years. Ugo Fisch's outstanding work made the University of Zürich the center of neurotology and skull base surgery in the world at that time. Moreover, the current chairman, Prof. Alexander Huber, is one of his previous students as there are several chairpersons globally who had engaged with Ugo Fisch during his active time. A large number of colleagues and even patients communicated with him still after his retirement, asked for advice, and were impressed by his fast and serious reply to every email. This habit has been maintained until one month before his death.

Ugo Fisch's death is a great loss to the world's otoneurology and skull base surgery circle. We have lost a great mentor, sincere colleague, and dear friend. Physicians and academic organizations worldwide have spontaneously organized various forms of memorial activities. His great achievements and noble personality are always worthy of our remembrance and always inspire us to meditate on the subject, perfect the surgical techniques, and care for patients.

Ugo Fisch's spirit will last forever!

Prof. Dr. Thomas Linder