

Philippe Coumel (1935-2004)

On 18 March 2004, Philippe Coumel passed away in Paris, victim of a cruel illness.

Philippe Coumel spent his entire professional life in the Arrhythmia Unit of the Cardiology department at the Hôpital Lariboisière in Paris, where Yves Bouverain had been the first head of department, followed by Robert Slama and then Coumel himself.

He was one of the pioneers of modern electrophysiology. In the 1960s, he studied the mechanisms of arrhythmias through programmed electrical stimulation and made discoveries that today may seem excessively simple but which have helped shape arrhythmology as it is today.

Outstanding among his most important findings are the effects of bundle branch block during reciprocating atrioventricular tachycardia in the anatomic localization of the bundle of Kent; the vagal component in atrial fibrillation without structural cardiac heart disease; and the definition of reciprocating atrioventricular tachycardia with slow retrograde conduction which bears his name. He was indeed a pioneer when, in collaboration with Michel Mirowski, he performed the first anti-tachycardia defibrillator implant in Europe.

Coumel made important studies of ventricular tachycardia in children and adolescents and introduced the concept of catecholaminergic ventricular tachycardia or the controversial short-coupled *torsades de pointes* (Leenhardt syndrome).

On perceiving the limitations of programmed stimulation in the modulation of some arrhythmias, he re-

turned to research using Holter recordings via a sophisticated IT system. In the study of arrhythmogenesis Coumel introduced the triangular concept that simplified interaction between the 3 classical factors that produce arrhythmia: substrate, modulating factors, and triggering factors.

Philippe Coumel published over 450 articles and chapters, many of which have become classics, and in 1997 he received the North American Society of Pacing and Electrophysiology (NASPE) "Pioneer in Electrophysiology Award" in recognition of his professional career.

In spite of being rather out of the public eye in recent years, in the history of arrhythmology, Philippe Coumel will be remembered as one of the pioneers who with commitment, dedication and brilliance helped the discipline reach its current state of development.

Above all else, Philippe Coumel was an intelligent man and a great animator of we *fellows* who passed through Lariboisière in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Before our very eyes, he knew how to transform cardiac electrophysiology and arrhythmology into something not simply interesting but entertaining.

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