

Obituaries



JEAN RENE CAUSSE (right) with James Robinson (left)

JEAN RENE CAUSSE JEAN BERNARD CAUSSE

In just two days in December last year the world of Otology lost two of its most charismatic and influential members.

Jean Rene Causse died on the eleventh at the age of 91 and Jean Bernard Causse died on the thirteenth at the age of 57.

Jean Rene learned the stapedectomy technique from John Shea in 1961 and, along with George Portmann, introduced it to France. He developed and promoted total stapedectomy with vein graft to the oval window and Teflon piston. His clinic was in the ground floor of the family apartment block in Beziers, but progressively expanded to occupy most of the space. This building, in Avenue Alphonse Mas, became a Mecca for Otologists throughout the world, starting a tradition of outstanding hospitality and surgical guidance which was to become synonymous with Beziers.

Jena Rene retired in 1978 but remained very much in touch with developments in otology, especially of stapes surgery. He was very proud of his son's achievements and was a regular supporter at his meetings despite his advancing years. My memories of him are of a charming man filled with interest in a subject which still enthralled him, and of a home filled with lovely old French furniture and superb contrasting modern art. On one occasion, in a backhanded compliment, he said that he enjoyed my visits because I spoke French so slowly, he could



JEAN BERNARD CAUSSE

no longer keep up with the young French doctors who spoke so fast.

Jean Bernard joined his father in his clinic in 1975 and after a couple of years changed his technique to a 0.8 mm stapedotomy closed with a vein graft and using a 0.4 mm Teflon piston. By the time his father retired the clinic had carried out 21,000 cases and was rapidly running out of space.

In 1988 building started on an ambitious and innovative new clinic on the edge of the village of Colombiers a few kilometres west of Beziers. This exciting new building, named after his father, was to become one the largest and most prestigious otology centres in the world, and a powerful magnet for Otologists everywhere.

Jean Bernard's hospitality and generosity were legendary and there can be few ENT surgeons, with an interest in stapes surgery, who did not make at least one pilgrimage. Some found his flamboyant style difficult, but none could deny his consummate skill and diligence. Although not everyone understood or agreed with the details of his technique it would be difficult to argue with a man who had performed more operations for otosclerosis than many ENT surgeons have inserted grommets. Having had the opportunity to observe him perform a

considerable number of procedures I became aware of the predictive advantages of wide experience. To my initial surprise it became apparent that every stapes procedure is different and that he was able to predict these variations very early on in the operation, an ability that can only be possible after extensive experience. It is this invaluable resource which we have lost along with his enthusiasm to share his knowledge. Having been fortunate to work with him on a number of courses in the clinic I am only too aware of the importance of his input at a time when interest and confidence in stapes surgery was beginning to wane.

Jean Bernard was very proud of his American and British involvement, and made great efforts to polish his already excellent English. He used CNN and BBC television as an aid to this and also asked me to

correct any errors. I explained that I was reluctant to do this because “foreigners” found his English charming. I hope that the word “fragilise” has become part of our vocabulary as well as the single word “pieceoveingraff”.

Sadly the latter years of his life were not only marred by deteriorating health but also with serious business problems at his clinic. These culminated in him leaving and returning to practice in Béziers and later on the coast at Sète. It was typical of the man that despite all his problems he was starting again.

Otology has lost a phenomenon, the next generation has lost a wealth of experience and many of us have lost good friends.

Aurevoir mes amis et bon repos.

JAMES ROBINSON