

NEWS

80th birthday of Professor Karel Smetana

This year Professor Karel Smetana, an internationally recognized specialist in cell biology, cytochemistry and oncology, celebrates his 80th birthday. I am grateful to the Journal of Applied Biomedicine for giving me an opportunity to congratulate him, my teacher and friend, on this jubilee, adding a few personal memories with the reminder of his scientific and teaching achievements. As early as a beginning assistant at the Department of Biology of the Faculty of Medicine in Brno, I had a chance to admire his broad as well as detailed knowledge of the microscopic and submicroscopic structures of the cell nucleus and nucleolus, and the sophisticated methods with which he was able to discover more and more functions of these cellular subsystems. The goal he always had in mind was to contribute to an understanding of the molecular basis of physiological and pathological processes in the human body. In the 1960s and 1970s, as Senior Scientific Officer at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, he was responsible for or involved in a number of scientific projects achieving remarkable results. To mention only a few, these were the classification of nucleoli based on their structure and function, a detailed analysis and description of the structural and functional organization of nucleoli and nuclear RNP components, and the structural expression of nuclear and nucleolar biosynthetic activities. Professor Smetana can also claim credit for the development as well as improvement of many important methods, such as cytochemical methods for the demonstration of RNA, DNA and non-histone acidic proteins, ultrastructural cytochemistry of RNA and DNA, cytochemistry and fine morphology of blood and leukemic cells, and in situ image densitometry.

Because of his broad experience in experimental cell biology, he has been invited several times to the USA, as Full Professor at the Department of Pharmacology, Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. In the years 1984 to 1990 he was Director of the Institute of Haematology and Blood Transfusion in Prague, he held the positions of Senior Scientific Officer and Head of the Laboratory for

Cytology and Electron Microscopy at the same institute from 1990 to 2004 and is at present still an active Senior Scientific Officer.

The results of his research have been published in scientific journals in more than 300 papers dealing with the cell nucleus, the nucleolus, malignant cells including leukemic cells and blood cells; he wrote, with Professor H. Busch, one monograph entitled “The Nucleolus” and six chapters in various scientific monographs; he was a contributor to seven textbooks for pregraduate and postgraduate students of biology and medicine.

As a lecturer he has always been good at holding his audience attention and his lectures are known for their original topics and riveting presentation. His teachings have produced both researches and academics who carry on his ideas in theory and practice. His “students”, Professor Ivan Raška and Professor Pavel Hozák, are internationally renowned scientists involved in research on nuclear and nucleolar structures and functions.

The list of his contributions would not be complete without mentioning his membership of many international scientific societies, scientific boards and editorial offices of international journals. Professor Smetana received over 20 Honours and Awards. His life credo has always been that “we should do something for suffering people regardless of the efforts”, and he has been putting it into effect since his student years.

On behalf of the Czechoslovak Society for Biology and of all his friends from the Department of Biology at the Faculty of Medicine in Brno, I would like here to convey our admiration for everything he has done for science and express our sincere wishes for good health, further scientific achievements and also for wellness and happiness in private life.

Roman Janisch
Department of Biology, Faculty of Medicine,
Masaryk University in Brno,
rjanisch@med.muni.cz