

Herbert Eckstein: A Modest Man, A Great Surgeon

Dr. Burhan Say

Director,

*H.A. Chapman Institute of Medical Genetics,
Tulsa, Oklahoma*

I first met Dr. Herbert Eckstein in 1958 when he joined the Hacettepe Children's Hospital, Ankara, Turkey as a pediatric surgeon. Dr. Eckstein established the first pediatric surgery department in Turkey. Until then pediatric surgery was a part of the orthopedic department, primarily treating orthopedic problems of children. I had myself joined the newly established Hacettepe Children's Hospital in 1958. Professor İhsan Dođramacı, the founder of the hospital (and later of the Hacettepe University) told me that he was trying to bring a pediatric surgeon from outside the country since none existed in Turkey at that time.

When I was told that the son of the esteemed pediatric professor Dr. Albert Eckstein was the chosen candidate I felt that this was an excellent selection since the Eckstein family was very well known in Turkey for their contribution to Turkish medicine. Not only was Professor Eckstein the first chairman of the Pediatric Department of Ankara University School of Medicine, his wife Dr. Erna Eckstein later was the first superintendent of the Hacettepe Children's Hospital.

When Herbert joined us, I am sure he immediately realized the enormous difficulties he faced starting a new department. He single handedly planned the surgical theaters, selected instrumentation required and even had to personally recruit medical staff including nurses etc. Within a few short months, the result was a spotless, shiny new department as well as anywhere. He presented a perfect example of a caring, extremely well-trained surgeon to everyone around him. His case discussions were truly a delight. His interest in and dedication to his patients was indeed wonderful. He would stay long hours at the hospital and regularly conduct night rounds in addition to his daytime schedule.

I fondly remember how his colleagues used to tease him saying that "he must be sewing again tonight", when they saw his car in the parking lot. He had a "Singer" car, probably the only one in Ankara and we all called it the largest sewing machine in the world.

Herbert Eckstein's work in Ankara attracted considerable interest in other European centers. Among those who came to see his department at the Hacettepe Children's Hospital was Mr. (later Sir) Denis Browne. His private visit, together with his wife Lady Moyra Ponsoby, was a great encouragement and honor for the new surgical clinic.

One of his greatest contributions to Turkish medicine outside of establishing the first pediatric surgery department in Turkey, was his contributions in pediatric research. I still remember how diligently he researched urinary tract stones which were and still are a big problem for Turkish children. In a "pre-computer" literature search era, he had to tediously scan every publication (major or minor) for articles on this subject. The result of his effort was a monumental work which I believe still is a classic on this subject.

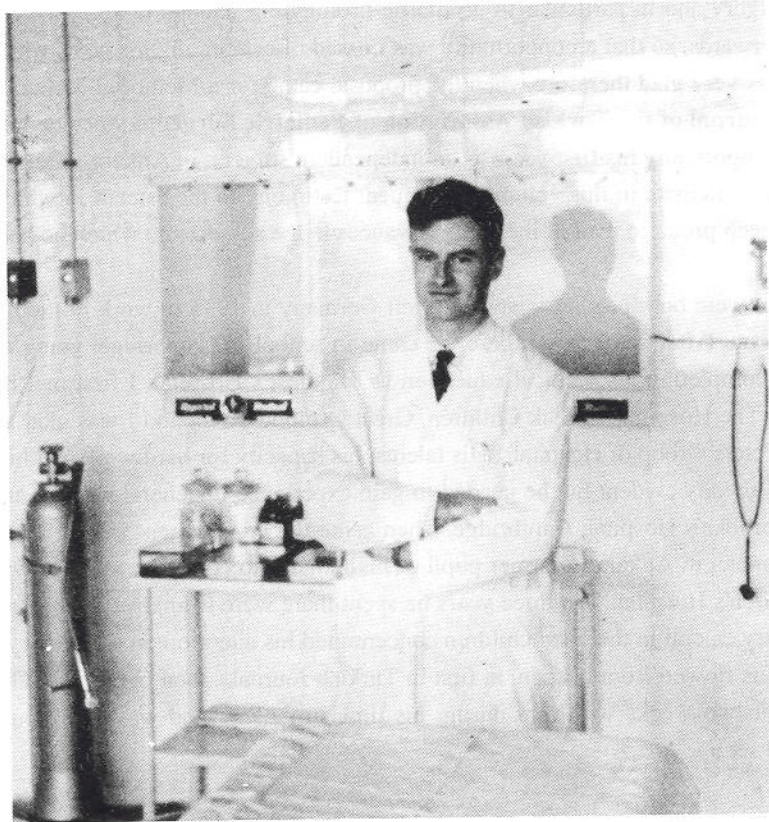
I believe it was during the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Hacettepe Children's Hospital in 1983 that I saw Herbert and his wonderful wife for the last time in Turkey. He was one of the few guests of honor in-

vited for the occasion. I sat with him often during scientific presentations and other events reminiscing about the good old days. His wife Maria was with him and was as gracious and pleasant as always. We talked about my visit with them in London and the wonderful times we had together thanks to their great hospitality. I sadly noticed at that time that he was not in good health.

Herbert was a quiet and probably a very shy man who totally dedicated his life to his family and his patients. His scientific achievements I know will be presented in some detail in this publication. What I tried to say, albeit briefly in this communication is how much he and his family have done for Turkey, by not only helping his patients to better health, but also training medical personnel at all levels. Herbert was truly one of the kindest men I have ever known and I am so glad that his contributions are now acknowledged by his friends and colleagues.



Herbert Eckstein was keenly interested in the circumstances that led to development of urinary stone disease in Turkish children and had taken to carry out field work. Transportation was rather inconvenient in rural Anatolia, nevertheless Herbie found a way by travelling together with a "Sana" margarine distributor he had befriended. Even then there were times when he was met with more company than the help he needed to get on with his work (1959) - **Editor**.



Herbert Eckstein, Ankara 1958