

Johannes Clemmesen – a pioneer and founder of Danish cancer epidemiology has passed away on December 20, 2010 at the age of 102.

Johannes Clemmesen, born 1908, Danish Physician and Pathologist. His thesis from 1938 was on transplanted cancer from one animal species to another after X-ray exposure. Dr. Clemmesen was head of pathology at the Finsen Institute 1955-78, and became specialist in internal medicine in 1943 and in pathology in 1946. He founded and led the Danish Cancer Registry under the auspices of the Danish Cancer Society in 1942 giving Denmark a unique position in understanding cancer causes, development and incidence. He led the Danish Cancer Registry until 1980. During his leadership a constant and high profiled scientific production was authored by him – especially the link between bladder cancer and tobacco consumption, the high incidence of testicular cancer and not the least the shape of the age incidence curve of breast cancer with "Clemmesens hook" at the menopause indicating 2 types of breast cancer – one among younger women and another among the older. His publication series in 5 volumes "Statistical studies in malignant neoplasms" still stand as a milestone in cancer epidemiology with observations and analysis and literature review up to 1977. On the basis of his work and ideas the cancer epidemiology of the Danish Cancer Society was developed and many younger researchers can thank Clemmesen for developing the possibilities upon which they base their research in cancer. He was due his importance for establishing cancer registries internationally one of the fathers of the International Association of Cancer Registries and also the longest living honorary member. His life time achievement in research and the creation of the Danish Cancer Registry led to a doctor honoris causa at Århus University in 1978. He was acknowledged in 2003, at the age of 94 with the Danish Cancer Society Senior Research Prize, which he instantly supplemented by own funds to form Johannes Clemmesens Cancer Research Fund focused on the causes of cancer, in particular testis cancer with a very high incidence in Denmark shown by his cancer registry – his life achievement. Clemmesen had a good and active life even beyond age 94. He lived to see his life achievement be pulled apart by authorities separating cancer registration from research of which he expressed his deep concern. He did not live his active life long enough to see the modernized cancer registration blossom. His latest years were devoted to cope with old age and domestic matters.

Hans Henrik Storm MD
Danish Cancer Society
Former Director Danish Cancer Registry

Johannes Clemmesen and Calum Muir

