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Obituary J. W. ten Cate

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OBITUARY

Obituary J. W. ten Cate

1 | IN MEMORIAM: JAN WOUTER TEN CATE



1.1 | What we all know and what may be new to some of you

Jan Wouter: humor, out of the box, non-conventional, non-hierarchical, headstrong, clever

Jan Wouter: modest, non-self-indulgent, "The patient is overall important"

On August 21, 2020 Jan Wouter ten Cate died at the age of 81 in his home in Duivendrecht, very close to Amsterdam. Jan Wouter ten Cate was the founder of clinical research in thrombosis and hemostasis in the Netherlands. Although he would himself never claim these important achievements, for young scientists entering the field after his retirement to read this memorial may prove useful for endorsing their own careers.

1.2 | Life and science

Jan Wouter was born in Amsterdam and studied medicine at the University of Amsterdam, specialized in internal medicine,

and defended his PhD thesis in 1971 with the subject "Platelet functions in relation to haemostasis." He became head of the department of thrombosis and hemostasis of the former Wilhelmina Gasthuis in Amsterdam, which later on, after the Academic Medical Center was formed, extended into the Centre for Thrombosis-Haemostasis-Atherosclerosis and Inflammation Research. In this fertile scientific environment, Jan Wouter, with his immense sense of humor, gift of speech, and flamboyant presentation, attracted numerous talented, rebellious, and untamable young PhD students, who were seeking a bright future and were magnetized by his appearance. The first contact was nearly always brisk and direct: "Do you want work really hard? Are you brilliant? How old are you? You can start tomorrow." Afterward, later in a nearby café, the salaries were conjured out of the magician's hat. The next day, the student learned that hard working with integrity would be the line to follow. Many PhD theses and dozens of top journal articles appeared, thus creating a wonderful scientific perpetuum mobile, engineered by this unique, jovial person with his impressive moustache. In building his own career, Jan Wouter ("JW" as he was called by his friends, students, and close colleagues) had several role models: his father, who had a keen scientific interest and gained respect as a successful anatomist and from whom JW inherited a strongly developed sense of justice and above all, honesty. Wilhelm Drukker, nephrologist, who was one of the first physicians to use the artificial kidney he received from Dr Willem Kolff. Dr Dirk Durrer, cardiologist, who was instrumental in describing the normal and pathological electrical conduit of the heart. Jan Wouter wanted to equal his fame and asked him "How do I get as famous as you Professor Durrer? What is your secret?" Dr Durrer replied: "ten Cate my secret is: work very hard! And now get out of my office!" John O'Brien, English hematologist, who worked out of a caravan in Portsmouth, South England and performed brilliant lab experiments on platelets with minimal means. He was very generous and hospitable and gave Jan Wouter full responsibility from the beginning. These lessons would be important building blocks for shaping his own unique environment later on.

1.3 | Memories

How is an academic specialist's success best measured? Well, what is better than by giving the word to a selection of his 50 PhD students,

who not only had a wonderful time working in the department but progressed their careers as successful (clinician) scientists, many of whom went on to become professors in their specialty. These personal histories and anecdotes, without humbug, “and keep it short!” describe JW at his best and paint a picture of this scientist, teacher, and doctor.

1.3.1 | Eric A. van Royen (PhD thesis, 1974)

I met Jan Wouter shortly before obtaining my medical degree in 1972. Professor Kloosterman of the Department of Obstetrics suggested I pay him a visit. During my internship I had done a term paper on blood coagulation during pregnancy, inspired by a patient suffering from severe eclampsia and a bleeding disorder. “Doctor Ten Cate knows all there is to know about blood coagulation; he’ll help you.” “Nice work on that term paper, van Royen,” he grunted in a deep, smoky voice, “we’ll turn it into a thesis.” My research progressed well. How could it not? I had Jan Wouter’s relentless enthusiasm, the lab girls’ assistance, and the ambiance of that growing scientific powerhouse to push me along.

1.3.2 | Cees Breederveld (PhD thesis, 1981)

JW thought it was important to have as many of his people, young doctors, students, and analysts as possible participating in international congresses. He took us in his Ford Transit; we camped in tents near the congress city. His red ballpoint was his instrument for correcting manuscripts. Through my first attempt at an article about a girl with an extremely rare factor V deficiency went a thick red line with the message: “Do it all over again.” Without further instructions.

1.3.3 | Harry R. Büller (PhD thesis, 1981)

Quote of JW: “Make sure to reach your scientific zenith a.s.a.p. by the following: 1. One or two papers in the *NEJM* or *The Lancet*, 2. Successful supervision of a few PhD theses, and 3. To be invited for a major lecture. After you have accomplished that, you can give everything to others.” JW was convinced that a junior PhD was to be the first and corresponding author of any scientific manuscript if she/he had done most of the work: unique, when compared to other countries or even other cities in our country.

1.3.4 | Marjolein Peters (PhD thesis, 1984)

Forty years ago, I started my PhD training in neonatal hemostasis and thrombosis, a rather unknown field. The most impressive and hilarious moment is how I met JW for the first time: I was a young intern in obstetrics performing home deliveries and stayed in an apartment above the laboratory of JW. Exhausted after a night shift, I dropped my keys one story down on the balcony of the lab of JW. I entered the

lab and JW asked. “Who are you, what are your future plans, and when can you start?” I left the room with my keys and a PhD appointment.

1.3.5 | Auguste Sturk (PhD thesis, 1987)

As head of the laboratory of JW, I performed research on platelet activating factor and its role in platelet function. The quantification of its production by human granulocytes was extremely difficult. I asked JW whether he agreed to start these investigations and he agreed full-heartedly. Only after the successful study of three Zellweger patients, he told me that he initially seriously doubted whether we would ever be able to set this up in our laboratory. A fine example of the trust and opportunities he gave everyone and his open mindedness on the work he allowed his co-workers to do.

1.3.6 | Menno V. Huisman (PhD thesis, 1987)

My interview with JW consisted of three questions: “How old are you? Are you brilliant? Are you married?” I responded that the third question was beyond his business. The next day I found myself in the lab, trying to purify Protein C, with the help of Paul Ockelford, as left-handed as myself. JW had strong convictions. He thought that performing research and subsequently writing the paper was foremost to be an individual endeavor, no co-authors needed. Every day he asked us: “Any new articles ready? Have you thought of a brilliant idea?” We wondered whether we would ever equal this impressive character but, by God, inspiring it was. JW always declared that he wanted to be surrounded by people who would be better than himself. Some perhaps did, but in a way really nobody could and would equal him.

1.3.7 | Sander J. van Deventer (PhD thesis, 1987)

I joined Jan Wouter’s group shortly after the first *New England Journal of Medicine* publication in 1986—many more would follow—and my first assignment was to bring a senior hospital financial controller home, after he had been drinking more than a bottle of whiskey at the celebration of this *NEJM* accomplishment in Jan Wouter’s office. My career and personal development have been deeply influenced by Jan Wouter’s greater-than-life personality, combining hard work with fun, and a barrage of crazy ideas with a deep interest in music and the arts. Jan Wouter had a never-ending mission to provide the best treatment to patients and if such treatment did not exist, it was our task to develop it. And that is what we did.

1.3.8 | Marcel Levi (PhD thesis, 1991)

I was a third-year medical student and when I asked Jan Wouter a question after a medical lecture, he hired me on the spot and sent

me in 1985 to Giancarlo Agnelli in Perugia (Italy) to evaluate compression ultrasonography for the diagnosis of deep vein thrombosis. I had a fantastic year, but the highlights were the regular visits from Jan Wouter. He was invariably sitting in the front row of the bus from Rome—almost as his own pope-mobile—and he always brought good advice; great ideas; a bit of money to support my living; and above, all a lot of friendship and mentorship, which lasted for more than 35 years.

1.3.9 | Giuseppe Avvisati (PhD thesis, 1990)

My research on promyelocytic leukemia started in Amsterdam at the Wilhelmina Gasthuis and later at the AMC (Amsterdam Medical Center). After my return to Rome, Jan Wouter came to meet me and we made a stroll in the center of Rome. There, in the shop window of the famous Roman toyshop “la Città del Sole (the House of the Sun)” we saw the small wooden train by Brio® and JW said, “That’s what you need for your son David, he will play with this train for many years as did my son Andreas.” Today, 40 years after this stroll, our 6 grandchildren when they come to Rome still play with a now very long wooden Brio train initiated in 1983 by JW.

1.3.10 | Paolo Prandoni (PhD thesis, 1992)

JW is the one that, after carefully evaluating my attitudes during a short stay in the AMC in Amsterdam in the mid 1980s, decided to establish a collaboration with my center in Padua, and encouraged his co-workers (Harry R. Büller, Menno V. Huisman, Ton Lensing, and soon after Martin Prins) to help me finalize clinical research in the field of venous thromboembolism. Considering the challenges I met in Padua, the role of Jan Wouter and his team was essential for achieving success. He is the best person I have ever met in my scientific life, my true teacher. Without him, I simply would not exist.

1.3.11 | Giancarlo Agnelli

JW had a great vision about how to conceive academic life. He was certainly against the old stereotypes of internal medicine

and promoted, whenever possible, new academic clinical models. Students and young medical fellows always had a central position in his views and projects. One of my most vivid recollections of JW was his contagious joy of living. The hospital party with drinks and music that he organized at the AMC to celebrate the publication in the *NEJM* of the Amsterdam Practitioners’ study on the use of IPG to diagnose deep vein thrombosis was one of the more memorable moments I shared with him and his team. An unforgettable experience.

And that is exactly what it was: this is what we all feel, thinking of JW, and how under his guidance we learned performing research, doing clinics in hemostasis and thrombosis, and enjoying life: an unforgettable experience.

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