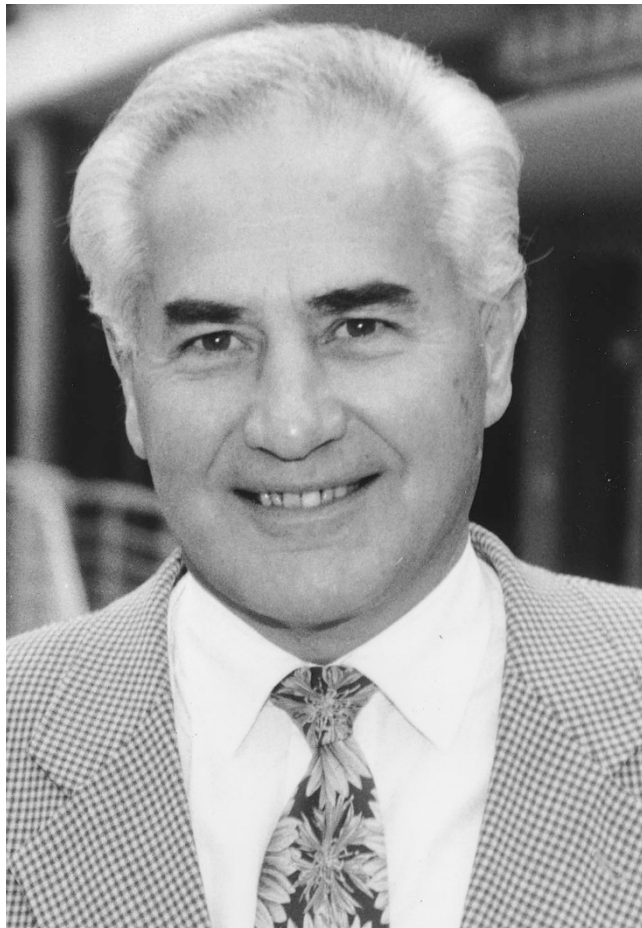




Profile of the IMSOP annual medalist for 1996

Dr Guido A Zäch, MD



Dr Guido A Zäch was born in 1935, at Hägenschwil in the canton of Saint-Gall, Switzerland. He studied medicine in Fribourg, Geneva, Vienna, Paris and Basle. In 1965, in the latter city, he received his medical diploma and became a specialist in Internal Medicine. Thereafter he specialised in Haematology at the University Clinic of Basle where he became responsible for the department of Haematology. In 1972 he organised the first Preventative Medicine Unit in Ilanz. In 1973, under the incentive of Professor Henry Nigst, he took over the leadership of the Paraplegic Centre of Basle, which, incidentally, had been designed, and run for a year, in 1967, by my dear friend Dr Lorie Michaelis. In 1973, after a telephone conversation with Professor Henry Nigst (which I will never forget!) I met Guido and decided to help him and Dr Walter Seiler, his assistant, as much as I could, along with the help of Dr Daniel Jacob-Chia. Guido and I were both working in the Rehabilitation Centre of Mulhouse, and his dynamism, along with all of his collaborators, was impressive (and still is, if not indeed increasing). He is very closely devoted to his patients,

listens, understands and, in some instances, is ready to help them socially. This is a rare quality which immediately struck me when I first met him. His philosophy of the treatment and rehabilitation of people with a spinal cord lesion is very close to the teaching and spirit of Sir Ludwig Guttmann who visited and encouraged him on several occasions. The centre really 'took off' under Guido's leadership. The earliest possible care of the spinal cord injured has always been his motto. The early transport was done, preferably, by helicopter, thanks to the Swiss Air Guard (REGA, of which he is a Council member) and the transportation sometimes took place in very difficult conditions indeed. Although small, Switzerland is, nevertheless, a very 'bumpy' country. Dr Zäch has published, with different collaborators, more than forty scientific articles and has made presentations in, at least, three different languages. One must remember that there are four official languages in Switzerland as well as, 'on the side', English. He is member of several (16) Swiss and International medical and other allied professional societies.

In 1975, he created the Swiss Paraplegic Foundation which now, in 1996, has more than one million donors, not only in Switzerland but also abroad. The intention is to help disabled people, not only the victims with spinal cord lesions, but also other very disabled people, to reintegrate into society. He has always respected and enhanced the dignity of disabled people, and his fight has ceaselessly been against the unfair disparity between the causality and finality of those with severe disabilities and their handicaps. The Foundation has also helped several scientific and social research programmes as well as projects concerning different aspects of disabilities mainly caused by spinal cord lesions. The Foundation has also enabled IMSOP to create the Swiss Interdevelopment Fund with the view of assisting doctors and health professionals in developing countries to attend our annual and regional meetings, and permit visits to centres in different countries. It has also been instrumental in allowing the First International IMSOP Seminar for developing countries to be held, in conjunction with the Indian Government and WHO support, in New Delhi, last year.

Dr Zäch in 1980 received the First Prize for Rehabilitation from the Swiss Federation of the Disabled; in 1988, the Adèle Duttwiller Prize; and this year the Annual Medal of IMSOP.

In 1980 he created the Swiss Association of Paraplegics which concerns twenty five clubs of wheelchair users, who help one another, and also have a great interest in developing sports for the disabled. Guido is the President of this association. In 1987 the construction of the new Swiss Centre for Paraplegics in Nottwil, of which he is the Director and Chief Consultant, was started. It is situated next



to the beautiful lake of Sempach which pumps energy to heat the centre (I do not know if he pumps his own energy from there as well!). This centre was built, and is run, under the auspices of the Swiss Paraplegic Foundation.

In 1990 the Centre started with 96 beds and eight beds for intensive care. Its architecture is remarkable, an example of a model that many of us would hardly dare to dream of. The organisation is most efficient, and encompasses all aspects of rehabilitation and social prevocational re-integration.

On a personal basis, in my capacity as President of IMSOP, he has helped me to travel, under the banner of our Society, mainly to developing countries. The goal was to get as many doctors

and allied health professionals as possible interested in the problems of people with spinal cord lesions and to encourage them to join IMSOP thus receiving our journal SPINAL CORD. Besides all this, Dr Zäch is also a well known numismatic expert, and his other main interests are: gardening, (Swiss) history, and antiques. He is an active Colonel in the Swiss army.

The IMSOP Medal for 1996 is well deserved by Guido, not only for his professional, but also for his human qualities and all of his many distinguished achievements.

Dr Paul Dollfus, MD
Past President of IMSOP