

## OBITUARY

# Jon van Rood (1926–2017)

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It is with great sadness that we have learned about the passing of one of EBMT's founding and honorary members, Prof. Jon van Rood on 21 July at the age of 91. Jon was also the founding father of Bone Marrow Donors Worldwide (BMDW) and cofounder of the World Marrow Donor Association (WMDA). Although his physical condition increasingly limited his mobility, he continued to be scientifically active and could be found in his former office until his final days, still sparkling with ideas, challenging opinions, proposing projects and writing papers. With our deepest sympathy, our thoughts are with his family, friends and colleagues.

Jon was born on 7 April 1926, as the son of an architect and a musician and received his medical training at the Leiden University Medical Center (LUMC, Leiden, the Netherlands), where he eventually spent almost all of his professional life. He described his entry into transplantation immunology as 'a beautiful case of serendipity.' In fact, this was serendipity not only for himself, but also for our field. Beginning with his discovery of the HLA antibodies concurrently with Jean Dausset and Rose Payne in the 1950s, his scientific work and his managerial and social qualities have shaped immunogenetics, transplantation immunology and global cooperation in unrelated hematopoietic stem cell transplantation for 60 years. Beyond EBMT, BMDW and WMDA, he was also a cofounder of many important national and international organizations such as Eurotransplant, Europdonor (now known as Matchis) and the European Federation for Immunogenetics (EFI).

Since his finding in 1958 that pregnancy can induce leukocyte antibodies, he has made many important contributions to the field of histocompatibility and immunogenetics. He was the first to use a computer to analyze a larger number of serological reactions in order to be able to detect some of the first HLA alleles like 4a and 4b, now called Bw4 and Bw6. He recognized the importance of

HLA typing and introduced it into transfusion and transplantation medicine.

Until the very end of his life and long after his retirement from his academic position at the LUMC, Jon remained active: a few days before his death, he participated in a long teleconference, discussing the presentation and publication of observations on the role of inherited paternal antigens and noninherited maternal antigens in the outcome of hematopoietic cell transplantation, thus pursuing one of his favorite topics: the immune repertoire of mothers and children, and how these affect the outcome of organ and cell transplantations.

To enumerate the long list of honors and awards that he received over the decades would be very challenging. It is much easier to simply name the only significant prize missing, a fact so eloquently expressed by Leslie Brent in his book *A History of Transplantation Immunology*: 'It is unfortunate that the Nobel Committee did not see fit to include him among the recipients of the 1980 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine, for not only was he a co-discoverer of HLA, but he has continued to the present day to make many significant contributions to the HLA story.' These lines were written in 1996—and since then, his significant contributions continued for over 20 more years and opened new therapeutic options to thousands of leukemia patients every year.

Through his personal scientific achievements, Jon has inspired several generations of young scientists. This was reflected in the creation several years ago of two awards in his name, one from EBMT and one from EFI, delivered during the Annual Meetings of the two Societies. The Jon van Rood award from EBMT recognizes a top-level publication authored by a junior investigator during the year preceding the annual meeting. The past recipients of the EBMT Jon van Rood award are Luca Vago and Katharina Fleischhauer *N Engl J Med* (2010), Cristina Cunha *Blood* (2011), Oliver C. Goodyear *Blood* (2012), Nicoletta Cieri *Blood* (2013), Anita Kremer *Blood* (2014), Sanja Stevanovic *Blood* (2014), Robert Zeiser and Lukas Martin Schwab *Nat Med* (2015), Mathias Hauri-Hohl *Nat Immunol* (2015), Yael Zlotnikov Klionsky *Immunity* (2016) and Sabrina Ravens *Nat Immunol* (2017).

We will miss Jon's energy, his sharp mind, his wit, his power of speech and his sense of humor. We are profoundly grateful for having had him as a trailblazer and mentor. He will be remembered by all colleagues, students, friends, families and patients as a great hero and a true legend in the field of transplantation, and an inspiration to all of us.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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