



In memoriam Flemming Melsen (1938-2005)

Professor Flemming Melsen died prematurely at the age of 66 on March 17, 2005. By his death we lost a pre-eminent bone scientist, pathologist, teacher and good friend, who inspired a lot of younger members of the bone research community. Flemming grew up in the city of Silkeborg in Denmark, he got his medical degree from Aarhus University in 1969 and got his doctorate at the same institution in 1979. Flemming became a specialist in Pathology in 1982 and loved the diagnostic challenges associated with this specialty, especially histological analysis and bone histology in particular. His enthusiasm for his craft spread to a lot of his pupils over his many years as a teacher in this discipline at Aarhus University. He considered teaching one of his most important duties, and his lectures were always extremely well attended, very lively and never contained a dull moment. The admiration of his pupils was reflected in him being elected best University teacher at the Medical Faculty.

Flemming pioneered bone histomorphometry in Scandinavia, and quickly rose to become a world-renowned researcher in this area. He was one of the founding members of the International Society for Bone Morphometry and was in charge of the highly successful Fourth International Bone Morphometry meeting in Aarhus in 1984. His doctoral thesis reported important new data on technical issues and reproducibility pertaining to histomorphometric analysis, that are still being used extensively today. He also described new aspects of bone remodeling in hyperparathyroid and hyperthyroid states. All along his scientific work was continuing, while he occupied a full time position in general surgical pathology. In his capacity as a hard working general surgical pathologist he made important contributions to the clinical handling of patients with breast cancer, colon cancer, thyroid- and hyperparathyroid diseases. He loved the interaction with surgeons over the microscope or at clinical conferences and formed the basis of very successful and productive collaborative initiatives benefiting patients in terms of shorter waiting times for diagnoses and quick decision making with respect to surgical procedures needed.

With his collaborative spirit Flemming quickly established a tight connection to the productive stereologic environment at Aarhus University. Although working at the same University in the same city, Flemming and Hans Joergen Gundersen did not know of each other's existence until they met at the Third Histomorphometry meeting in Sun Valley in 1980. After meeting, the fruitful collaboration with Professor Gundersen began. This fruitful collaboration with Professor Hans Joergen Gundersen led to a host of doctoral theses, which incorporated stereologically correct estimations of histomorphometric variables like mean wall thickness, osteoid thickness, mineralizing surface, osteocyte numbers, bone volume, bone structure and also to important new information on bone remodeling from reconstruction of remodeling sequences in trabecular and cortical bone during normal and pathologic conditions as well as immunohistochemical analysis. The combination of his trained eye as a pathologist and his continuing enthusiasm for the analysis of tissue sections led to several important analyses of metabolic bone disease and descriptions of basic biology features of bone like the Bone Remodeling Compartment.

Flemming was an excellent cook and a generous host, and all of us have enjoyed many a spirited evening at his home together with him and his spouse, Jette. For those of us who had the honor and privilege to work with Flemming over a period spanning more than 25 years, his absence will be greatly missed. It was a period of spirited scientific discussions, joyful traveling, good wine and food and loyal camaraderie. The absence of his continued joyful company is a great loss for all of us.

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Flemming was one of the early disciples of the new paradigm, devoted during his whole career and he became a giant in this science. First of all, he developed the technique and understanding of histomorphometry on a large scale and in this way he quantified and qualified new medical knowledge with many contributions.

In the early seventies, I sent some specimens to Flemming from horses with an incurable orthopaedic disorder called navicular disease. His message was that this was a reversible condition of biomechanical origin, not a chemical game but a mechanical game. This opened a drama in my profession, not seen before and is still going on.

Generously and very strict, Flemming became my mentor and companion during all these years and I cannot overstate my gratitude for giving me this privilege to be involved in his unique career.

His groundwork became a milestone and his leadership and intense activities will be difficult to replace and many of us will miss him for giving us the opportunity to stand on his shoulders.

Lennart C. Østblom, D.V.M.