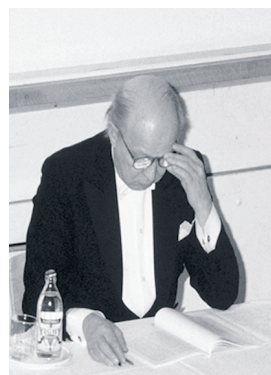


Pentti Rokkanen

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PENTTI ROKKANEN was born in the Kruunuhaka district of Helsinki on 14th July 1927 and, like many of his contemporaries, was interested in sports during his schooldays. He began to study medicine at the University of Helsinki in autumn 1947, and after working for some years at Lahti City Hospital he returned to Helsinki in 1959 to take up a position in the Department of Orthopaedics and Traumatology, which at that time was the largest traumatology centre for the treatment of accident victims in the Nordic countries and had an intensive care unit of its own, for which Pentti Rokkanen was to be responsible. This unit was regarded as one of the finest in Europe. The hospital also had its own laboratory for animal experimentation, which provided excellent facilities for research work.

In the years 1972–1975 he was chief physician in orthopaedics at the Regional Hospital of Central Finland, where he did much to develop the surgical treatment of traumas. Then, on 1st August 1975 he was appointed professor of orthopaedics at Tampere University Hospital, in which capacity he attempted to rationalize the surgical aspect of the department's work. The period spent in

Tampere also marked an important step in his scientific career.

Finally the President of Finland ratified his appointment as full professor of orthopaedics and traumatology at the University of Helsinki as of 1st January 1981, which meant that he was also head of the 1st Department of Surgery. He fulfilled this role excellently, adopting a fatherly but nevertheless rigorous and encouraging attitude towards his staff.

The most important aspect of Pentti Rokkanen's career was without doubt his research. His research students would frequently be greeted with the words, "What is not written down does not yet exist," and "Where is today's publication?" He made his presence felt both in their experiments with surgical materials and in their clinical examinations. The team's publications exceeded the "metric mile" mark, numbering 1610, and he himself was responsible for almost 400 original papers and supervised 49 doctoral theses, 34 of which were concerned with biodegradable bone fixation materials. His interest in this topic had been aroused in the 1970s, partly through his acquaintance with Professor Pertti Törmälä at Tampere University of Technology, which led to interdiscipli-

nary cooperation and the acquisition of a number of highly innovative patents. The strength properties of the implants that they developed astounded the world and the results of their research were presented at numerous international conferences. Nowadays these materials are being produced industrially and are in use to some extent in almost all parts of the world.

As a supervisor of research he was absolutely fair, as he was in everything he did, although concealed behind the charisma that inspired universal respect was a brilliant English-type sense of humour and a genuine understanding for his research students.

Pentti Rokkanen held many significant positions in Finnish and international organizations. He was chairman of the Finnish Medical Association in 1970-72, chairman of the Finnish Orthopaedic Associa-

tion in 1977-79 and president of the Nordic Orthopaedic Federation in 1988-90. He was a Finnish delegate to SICOT in 1986-94, and received the Pohjola Prize for Medicine in 1992. Professor Rokkanen was elected to membership of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1983.

Pentti would keep in daily contact with his friends. Once a friend was visited by his small grandchild, who asked straight away at the front door, "Has Pentti Rokkanen phoned you today?" He would also play cards with his friends, the stakes being "virtual" luxury yachts and warm-blooded thoroughbred horses which changed owner week after week without anyone ever catching even a glimpse of them.

He was supported in his daily life by his wife Riitta and his family, and he in turn supported them.

*Obituary by
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