



IN MEMORIAM

In memoriam René Peslin

F. Marchal^{*,#} and R. Farré^{†,‡}

René Peslin, director of Unité 14 INSERM in Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy, France, from 1985 to 1999, passed away on October 6, 2009.

As a young MD in the 1960s, he had been recruited as a researcher by Paul Sadoul, the founder of one of the very first INSERM units. At that time there was great concern about the deadly exposure of mine workers to coal and silica, and the European Community for Steel and Coal (ECSC) funded research programmes to study lung function in coal miners. René took part in a number of such studies, which included examining subjects on site in the northernmost area of Lorraine (France), after travelling for hours in an old van that would sometimes fall apart. René was actively involved with, and soon became an Associate Editor of, the *Bulletin Européen de Physiopathologie Respiratoire* (Clinical Respiratory Physiology), which later merged with the *European Journal of Respiratory Diseases* to constitute today's *European Respiratory Journal*.

In 1969, René spent a sabbatical year with Jere Mead at the prestigious Harvard School of Public Health in Boston (MA, USA). There, René developed a characteristic feature of his scientific mind that would guarantee his success in respiratory mechanics: extreme care with the methodological aspects in both fundamental experiments and clinical studies. This was a time when measuring FEV₁ was a challenge, when body plethysmography had not yet entered into the routine of the lung function lab, and when it took half a day to perform "by hand" a graphical analysis of forced oscillation mechanics. René's experience and input provided significant contributions to both our understanding of lung physiology and the scientific community at large.

René Peslin's scientific and medical path can be easily followed *via* his publications. Writing a scientific manuscript is an art he was fond of and excelled at. An impressive number of high-quality papers cover all areas of respiratory mechanics, from the basics to the bedside: proposing model interpretations of the frequency response of transfer respiratory impedance in humans (again at a time when high-frequency respiratory mechanics were a purely experimental venture); studying lung viscoelasticity on whole animal or isolated lung models; developing new equipment that made it possible to routinely measure forced oscillation mechanics in children; searching for

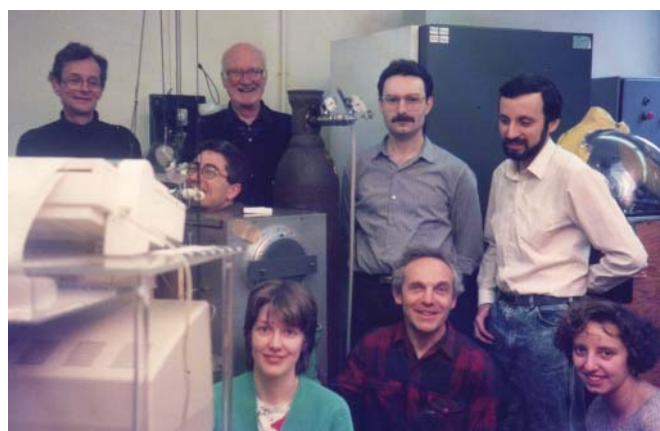


FIGURE 1. On-the-spot snapshot taken in 1988 at Unité 14 during an ongoing experiment on measurement of transfer respiratory impedance. Left to Right, standing: René Peslin, Jere Mead, Ramon Farré, Bela Suki; sitting: Ellie Oostveen, Claude Duvivier and Claudia Gallina; experimental subject is Daniel Navajas.

new algorithms to compute thoracic gas volume and airway resistance (some of which are now incorporated into commercially available equipment); improving the understanding of expiratory flow limitation in patients on mechanical ventilation using *in vitro* physical models, *in vivo* experimental animals and clinical studies, to mention just a few. René also contributed to a number of top-level reviews and was responsible for several book chapters, including one in the reference *Handbook of Physiology* [1].

While furthering our knowledge of respiratory mechanics, René was also crucial to the establishment of networks of committed scientists and, most importantly, to the recruitment and training of countless young researchers from all over the world. INSERM 14 was particularly appealing in the field of lung mechanics and became a meeting point for sharing René's scientific expertise and his enthusiasm for respiratory physiology, as illustrated in the picture.

INSERM Unité 14 closed in 1999 and René retired to the French Riviera, although he remained available for the continuing development of computerised analysis of physiological signals, for counselling on the interpretation of data and for writing manuscripts. As a lover of European history in general and Italian culture in particular, he became the webmaster of the Dante Alighieri Society in Cannes (France).

The Editorial Board of the *European Respiratory Journal* honours the memory of its brilliant former colleague, and an excellent scientist and person. We express our deepest sympathy to his

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wife Christiane, children Vincent, Hélène and Alice and grandchildren William, Matthieu and Ambra.

STATEMENT OF INTEREST

None declared.

REFERENCES

- 1 Peslin R, Fredberg JJ. Oscillation mechanics of the respiratory system. *In: Macklem PT, Mead J, eds. Handbook of Physiology: The Respiratory System.* Bethesda, American Physiological Society, 1986; pp. 145–178.