

## ISDE presidential biography: Antoon (Toni) Lerut

Antoon (Toni) Lerut was born in a small Belgian town within a medical family. He received his medical degree in 1970 and training in general surgery in 1975 at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. Early in his career, it was soon evident that he would become an academic surgeon. During his general surgery training, he became attracted to thoracic and esophageal surgery. Under the mentorship of Albert Lacquet and Jacques Gruwez, he developed his academic and surgical skills working especially on caustic burns of the esophagus as well as esophageal atresia. Supported by his mentors, he had the opportunity to improve his skills at an international level, first serving as a registrar in thoracic surgery with Ronald Belsey in Bristol, UK, and then completing a guest scholarship with David Skinner and Tom DeMeester at the University of Chicago, USA. In 1976, Toni Lerut returned to the department of general surgery at the Catholic University of Leuven under the directorship of Jacques Gruwez. He quickly established his reputation as an excellent clinical and academic esophageal surgeon by publishing seminal contributions on esophageal cancer.

After becoming a professor and head of general thoracic surgery at the university in 1994, he recruited bright, young, academic thoracic surgeons to help him establish the leading European center in thoracic and esophageal surgery.

Toni Lerut's reputation as a clinician scientist and teacher attracted more than 70 international thoracic surgery fellows and PhD students. He has given numerous named lectures and authored 350 articles in international peer-reviewed journals and 80 book chapters. He is co-editor of *Pearson's Thoracic and Esophageal Surgery*, the leading reference work in the field.

Based on his experience in Leuven but also of his fellowships, he quickly understood that multidisciplinary approach was the cornerstone for understanding and treating esophageal diseases and furthermore that international collaboration and networking would become increasingly important in the future. Both ideas would remain the beacons defining the way for his long and successful career.

Following the creation of the Japanese Society for Esophageal Diseases in 1965 and thanks to an initiative of Komei Nakayama, the International Society for the Diseases of the Esophagus was created in 1979.

The first meeting of this newly created society was held in 1980 and obviously, it was a great opportunity for Toni Lerut to get involved in this new undertaking from the beginning but also to visit the Department of Hiroshi Akijama in Tokio. Besides the Asian initiative, a group under leadership of David Skinner, Ronald Belsey, Sergio Stipa and Tom DeMeester developed the International Conference on Diseases of the Esophagus, based in the USA.

In the meantime, in Europe, the growing need for international societies was fulfilled by the initiatives of creating the World Organization for Specialized Studies on Diseases of the Esophagus (OESO) by Robert Giuli and Groupe Européen d'Etude des maladies de l'Oesophage (GEEMO—nowadays European Society for Diseases of the Esophagus (ESDE)) by Alberto Peracchia and François Feketé, in which Toni Lerut played a key role from the start (the seat of the society is still the University Hospital Leuven, Belgium).

All four societies came together to the ISDE meeting in Munich (under the Presidency of Rüdiger Siewert) in September 1986 where a decision was made to create one single organisation.

From 1987 onward, discussions were started around the definitions of structures and by-laws of the new society. A Council was created with Toni Lerut as one of the representatives for the Western Europe. GEEMO (nowadays ESDE) would become the European chapter of ISDE, OESO would become the research chapter (but later withdrew from ISDE). ISDE was scientifically very active through a central research committee with working groups around several topics, Toni Lerut being the chairman of the oropharyngeal functional disorders working group.

Although defined as a multidisciplinary society, ISDE had evolved to become, in the nineties, an almost exclusive surgical society as the non-surgical disciplines had developed their own societies based on their specific interests (interventional endoscopy, oncologic treatments and so on). But André Duranceau, realizing the need of a true multidisciplinary society, organized in Montreal (1998) a meeting on invitation, bringing back together surgical and non-surgical specialties.

Toni Lerut served as President of ISDE from 2001 to 2004: President. His presidency can be described as a key period for ISDE. For the first time, the goals of the society were defined. The first goal was

the implementation of the new by-laws, based on a document by Mark Ferguson defining a balance between surgical and non-surgical disciplines within ISDE including an alternance in Presidency between those two groups. The second goal was the transfer of the operational secretariat of ISDE to Los Angeles, USA with the creation of a possible combined ISDE-GEEMO membership. The third goal was the further development of the society journal (*Diseases of the Esophagus*), at that time published by Blackwell, with increasing support for editors, secretariat and royalties. Following this dynamic movement, the impact factors grew fastly to 1.6, under the skilful editorship of Claude Deschamps and Kenneth Wang.

The final goal was to hold the society meeting every 2 years, instead of every 3 years, based on a program defined by the ISDE program committee, completely independent of the meeting organizing committee.

Besides his presidency of ISDE, Toni Lerut has been the president of the European Association for Cardio-Thoracic Surgery, the European Society of Thoracic Surgeons and the European Surgical Association. He was the chairman of the European Union of Medical Specialists Section of Thoracic Surgery until 2018. Professor Lerut has been awarded honorary fellowships in 14 prestigious organizations, including the American Association of Thoracic Surgery, the American Surgical Association, the American College of Surgeons, the European Society of Thoracic Surgeons, the German Society for General and Visceral



**Fig. 1** Antoon (Toni) Lerut

Surgery, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

Since his retirement, he has been a visiting scholar with prolonged stay at a large number of prestigious university hospitals in USA, Turkey and China. In collaboration with physicians in Mali, The Gambia, Guinée, and Burkina Faso, he developed a teaching project to successfully treat children with caustic strictures.

Despite these accomplishments, Professor Lerut remains a humble gentleman who, in his free time, is enjoying the study of the history of medicine, traveling, the fine arts, classical music, and drinking fine wine with friends.

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