

## IN MEMORIAM

## Peter E. Valk, MD, 1940–2003

**W**e lost a teacher, a colleague, and, above all, a friend when Peter E. Valk, MD, passed away on December 16, 2003, in Berkeley, CA. He will be deeply missed by his many friends and colleagues throughout the nuclear medicine and PET community worldwide for his insight, knowledge, integrity, and humor.

Peter was born in Estonia, then a Soviet Republic, in 1940. At the age of 9, he immigrated with his family to Australia, where he grew up in Sydney, eventually making the decision to go into medicine. He received his Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery from the University of Sydney in 1968. After a period as an intern and resident in Sydney and Adelaide, Peter was appointed registrar in nuclear medicine at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney in 1970. In 1972, he moved to California, where he took a position as a research fellow in Dr. Thomas Budinger's group at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory. In 1975, Peter spent a year in Lyon, France, at the Université Claude Bernard, where he met his future wife, Carol. He returned to Australia in 1977 to take a position at the Sydney Hospital as director of medical imaging and ultrasound.

After a decade in Sydney, the Valks returned to the United States in 1986, once again to the Lawrence Berkeley Lab, where Peter became chief of medical imaging and, in 1989, an associate adjunct professor of radiology at the University of California at San Francisco. In 1992, he took a position as medical director of the Northern California PET Imaging Center (NCPIC) in Sacramento. Through hard work, insight, and sensitivity to health care issues, he established the NCPIC as one of the leading clinical PET centers in the world.

At a time when PET was widely viewed as merely a promising investigational procedure, he successfully negotiated with insurance companies in California for PET reimbursement. His early work demonstrating changes in patient management as a result of the use of PET and, therefore, cost benefits of PET in oncology was instrumental in gaining reimbursement for PET by insurance companies and later in securing Medicare coverage for certain cancers. His unique ability to analyze the diagnostic process changed the very way imaging was viewed by technology assessment groups and ultimately paved the way for reimbursement of clinical PET.

Peter's personal daily involvement in the reading of studies provided him with unique insight into the interpretation of PET scans, and he became one of the most experienced physicians in the application of

PET to imaging cancer. As the 1998 president of the Institute of Clinical PET (now the Academy of Molecular Imaging), he worked tirelessly to bring PET to every patient who could benefit from such a diagnostic procedure. He lectured widely on PET imaging in colon cancer, lung cancer, and many other cancers, presenting a balanced and critical view of the benefits.

In February 1997, he was invited by the International Atomic Energy Agency to visit Mendoza, Argentina, a city in the foothills of the Andes, to assist in setting up the Fuesmen Clinical PET Center. One of us (DWT) had the privilege of accompanying him on that visit, during which lectures were given, friendships established, and a clinical PET center launched. Back at the NCPIC, Peter continued to support these efforts in Argentina and to host visitors, not only from Argentina but from many other countries.

Peter spent much of the latter part of 2002 editing a major work on *Positron Emission Tomography: Basic Science and Clinical Practice* (New York, NY: Springer-Verlag; 2003). The book, a bestseller for the publisher and already in a second printing, will stand as a tribute to Peter and the unique contributions he made to the PET field, an accomplishment of which he himself was rightly proud.

In January 2003, he was diagnosed with one of the very diseases for which he had worked so hard to ensure an early diagnosis through PET. Despite his condition, Peter, with Carol by his side, traveled widely in Europe and the United States, showing an optimism and quality of life that was an example to all of us who knew him. We will miss his reflective comments, his shared experience, and the admirable sense of balance he adopted in his approach to life. We will miss his unique ability to reflect on a problem or situation and, then, perhaps days after the issue had been raised, to return and offer an insightful solution. Above all, we will miss his warm Australian sense of humor and his friendship.



Peter E. Valk

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