OBITUARY

Professor Emeritus Olav Axelson, MD*

One of the world's leading epidemiologists, Professor Emeritus Olav Axelson, MD died suddenly on 1 March after a short period of illness. He was 66 years old.

Olav Axelson was born in Alingsås, Sweden, on 1 May 1937. He received his medical training in Gothenburg, Sweden and worked for a number of years as a physician in internal medicine at Skövde general hospital. In 1969 he came to the newly established Clinic of Occupational Medicine in Örebro, Sweden, where he also started his scientific career by doing the first Swedish epidemiological study concerning the connection between radon exposure in mines and miners' lung cancer.

In the meeting with Professor Olli Miettinen, from McGill University, during courses in epidemiological methodology in the 1970s, Olav Axelson found a peer and valued discussion partner as well as the scientific tools he needed for his research studies. Epidemiological methods in occupational and environmental medicine became the research and teaching area that occupied him for the rest of his career.

In 1977 he moved to the University Hospital in Linköping where he became the first Professor in Occupational Medicine in Sweden. Along with his academic work he also founded the Clinic of Occupational Medicine in Linköping in 1978. He continued his research on radon exposure and in 1979 he published a ground-breaking study on health effects from radon exposure in homes. During his career he continuously studied exposure to radon, background radiation, solvents, and pesticides, but he was involved in most areas of occupational epidemiology. Theoretical epidemiology was another topic of great interest for him and one in which he made some very important methodological contributions. The probably greatest impact is from his and Dr Kyle Steenland's often quoted article on "Indirect methods of assessing the effects of tobacco use in occupational studies" (*Am J Ind Med* 1988;13(1):105-18).

He was author and co-author of more than 300 articles and book chapters and he was the supervisor of 20 students for doctoral degrees over the years. Some of these graduates are from Italy, a country that was very important for him and where he was especially highly regarded, scientifically and personally. Since 1985 he has been a fellow of the Collegium Ramazzini in Italy. He collaborated with numerous researchers in different disciplines from all over the world and was internationally requested. He was a member of many World Health Organisation (WHO) working groups and contributed to eight WHO monographs. He also made large contributions as an expert in many advisory committees, as reviewer for several international journals, and as a member of critical research funding committees.

Even though he retired in 2002, Olav Axelson continued his work at the departments of Occupational Medicine both in Linköping and in Örebro, and his death leaves a feeling of great loss and sorrow to the staff of those units. He was a brilliant scientist and a man of great integrity. His intellectual sharpness and vast knowledge, together with great wisdom and pursuit for rights and justice has characterised his lifetime achievements.

He will be deeply missed by us, his former colleagues, friends, and disciples at the Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine in Linköping. We are grateful to have had the privilege of working closely together with Olav Axelson and we, together with his many collaborators and friends around the world, will be honoured to continue sharing the fruits of his achievements.

Professor Olav Axelson is survived by his wife Gudrun, his son Torbjörn with family in Björbo, Sweden, and his daughter Kicki with family in Köpingsvik, Sweden. He was interred at Gärdslösa church at Öland, Sweden on 12 March 2004.

To honour Professor Olav Axelson, a fund in his name has been established at Linköping University, Sweden, and those interested can make donations through the following bank account: 5439-1001187 Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken, S-581 03 Linköping, Sweden, SWIFT: ESSESESS, , IBAN: SE31 5000 0000 05439 1001187.

G Wingren

Dept of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, IMK, University Hospital, Linköping 581 85, Sweden;
gunwi@imk.liu.se

.....
*This obituary will also be published in *Epidemiology*, *Scand J Work Environ Health*, *Am J Ind Med*, and *J Occup Environ Med*.