

RENÉ MÉLY¹

In memoriam Dr. Robert Heitz (1932-2021)

¹ MD, ECLSO Past-President, Valmont (France)

Our dear colleague Dr Robert Heitz passed away on December 11th 2021 after a long illness. He created some of the building stones of modern ophthalmology and contactology.

Robert Heitz was born in 1932 in Haguenau (Alsace, France). He obtained his medical degree in Strasbourg, where he also finalized his training as an ophthalmologist in 1960 with a thesis on the history of contact lenses: *Étude historique des principes et des applications des systèmes de contact oculaire dans le contexte des connaissances du XVI^e siècle à la première moitié du XX^e siècle* presenting a historical overview of the principles and systems applied to the cornea to improve and correct visual acuity. His work that had been translated and published in English built the fundament of his later works on this topic. In January 2001 he obtained a PhD in historical and philological sciences at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in Paris.

As an ophthalmologist and scientist, he combined several leading functions: beginning as director of the Eye Clinic in Haguenau (France) he became responsible for clinical ophthalmological training at the University of Strasbourg. At the same time, he held an advisory function for medical devices in ophthalmology at the French Ministry of Health.



Ryc. 1. Dr Robert Heitz

Enumerating his scientific publications about the cornea and contact lenses, in full volumes as well as journals and articles, would surpass the scope of this eulogy.

Apart from countless presentations, he published about 150 articles and some major volumes about contact lens wear, their history and public health issues. Together with Paul Cochet (Paris), Wulf Erich (Homburg/Saar) and Montague Ruben (London) he was co-founder of the European medical contact lens journal *Contactologia* (Enke Verlag, Germany), being one of its main editors from 1979 until 1991. He was also member of the editorial board of the Polish journal *Archives of the History and Philosophy of Medicine*. In 1988 he co-authored, with Gabriel Elie, the *Guide de Contactologie Médicale* (Enke Verlag) which soon became a reference book for contact lens fitting in France.

But his major scientific achievement remains the publication of his *History of Contact Lenses* published in three volumes in English by Wayenborgh Press (Belgium) between 2003 and 2014. It was part of his PhD thesis and is certainly the most scholarly and exhaustive work ever published on this subject.

He was a member of the following French and European societies: European Contact Lens Society of

Ophthalmologists (ECLSO), Société Française d'Ophthalmologie (SFO), Deutsche Ophthalmologische Gesellschaft (DOG), Société d'Ophthalmologie de l'Est de la France, Société Française des Ophthalmologistes adaptateurs de Prothèses de Contact (SFOALC), Société d'histoire de la médecine, Société francophone d'histoire de l'ophtalmologie, and Julius-Hirschberg-Gesellschaft fuer Geschichte der Augenheilkunde.

His eminent scientific work was officially recognized by prestigious awards: the ECLSO honored him with its highest award the Fick-Kalt-Müller Medal in 1983 and he became an Honorary Member of the society in 2009. In 1986 the International Contact Lens Council granted him the 'Louis Emile Javal Silver Service Distinction'. Dr Heitz also received the 'Ordre National du Mérite' from the French government for his distinguished services.

With Dr Heitz, the ophthalmological world has lost one of its most amiable and expert professionals, who combined both clinical practice and historical insight. He leaves to mourn his wife Rose, their three children and four grandchildren. His two sons followed in their father's footsteps and embraced professions in the optometric field.