

Professor Claude Lapras

Carmine Mottolèse

Published online: 26 July 2007
© Springer-Verlag 2007



I met Professor Lapras in September 1982 in Verona for the European Course of Neurosurgery. At that time, Prof. Lapras was already internationally renowned, and his clinical and scientific notoriety was strongly increasing. I was really deeply impressed by the strong and yet generous personality of this man who became my “Maitre,” my spiritual father. At that time, I was not aware of the

importance of this meeting and how it was going to change my life and my career as a neurosurgeon.

Claude Lapras was born in Lyon in 1930. He studied at the Faculty of Medicine of Lyon and became external student in 1949. He had his residency in 1953, and he became assistant professor in 1960. He was the pupil of Professor Wertheimer. Following his suggestion, he spent a year as a resident in the clinical ward of Prof. Claude Bertrand in Canada. When he came back in Lyon, he organized the Service of emergency for the care of cranial injuries.

He did his medical thesis on functional neurosurgery by focusing on the issue of abnormal movements. Interestingly, he also produced a movie on this topic. He became “*Chef de Clinique*” in 1961, “Maitre of Conference” in 1965, “Professor without Chair” in 1975, “Chef of Service” in 1978, and “Chair Professor in Neurosurgery” in 1983. He was a very skillful surgeon. His surgical method was characterized by fast, accurate, and precise movements, always rigorously programmed without excess and based on clear ideas and concepts. He had deep knowledge of anatomical surgery, and this allowed him to deal and overcome the most difficult situations he faced during his clinical practice.

As a clinical chief, he was a natural leader and was therefore called “Le Patron” which in France refers to a person who holds power but also deserves honors and the esteem of his peers and all people in general.

For 20 years, he was the president of the Medical Commission of the Neurological Hospital. He was a real drive for everyone, always investing his forces for the development and the recognition of the hospital at the local and national level and worldwide as well.

C. Mottolèse (✉)
Hôpital Neurologique P. Wertheimer,
59 Boulevard Pinel,
69677 Lyon, France
e-mail: carmine.mottolèse@chu-lyon.fr

Prof. Lapras was open-minded, always listening to others' requests, able to quickly understand the right way decisions had to be made for the best of patients and for the improvement of the department's medical program.

He was a wonderful teacher, always wishing to convey his knowledge and his experience in surgery to his students. His medical lessons were always clear and supported by practical examples, and as it happened at the international course in Verona, he always received the enthusiastic ovation of residents.

He was a wonderful model of life for pupils, a "Chef of School," "Le Maitre," "Il Maestro," "Magister," the person who is not only able to teach and to transfer his experience but he also became a "real example" of life for pupils.

He was a man of action ready to stimulate and push people to obtain the best by themselves, ready to give the example at every moment, passionate about neurosurgery, and also a man of great culture. He loved to stay with people in an active way because he liked to be in action.

He was able to talk about literature, painting, music, and sculpture in such a fascinating way to capture the attention of others easily.

Through his clinical and scientific career, he held several major positions and responsibilities in France and also for International Societies such as:

- General Secretary of the French Language Society of Neurosurgery
- Secretary of the European Society of Neurosurgery
- Member of the Auditing Committee of EANS
- Member of Auditing Committee of ISPN
- President of the International Society for Paediatric Neurosurgery
- President of the European Society for Paediatric Neurosurgery
- President of the Neuropsychiatry Society of the Rhone-Alpes Region
- President of the French Society of Paediatric Neurosurgery, society of which he was the founder and the first president.

He was the pioneer of the Paediatric Neurosurgery of the Lyon region, and he was able to expand his surgery "school" throughout the world. Indeed, currently, many of his pupils work in different continents.

The fight of his life was the recognition of pediatric neurosurgery as a true specialty of modern neurosurgery.

Professor Lapras was not only a great neurosurgeon but also a clever and great man with a very deep humanity and a great respect toward his own colleagues and other people in general.

He liked discussing about interesting topics that were far beyond medicine. He admired and supported people with

sharp personalities, especially those who strongly defended their opinion and their ideas with honesty.

In every occasion at the bed of patients or in other instance, he loved to ask with simplicity the opinion of the others and this even though he might already have reached the right decisions himself. He loved sharing the success but was always ready to assume the failures on his own.

He loved mountains and skiing, and all people that could share winter meetings with him can remember the happy hours spent skiing and descending behind him, slipping with elegance and efficacy the runs of powdery snow, always in the first line exactly as it happened in the surgical theater where it was simply genial and fantastic because he knew exactly when it was the moment to continue or when it was necessary to stop. He was simply "magnanimous" with all people, attached, as few people know, to do the art of good living, respecting in all the human dignity. For him, the power of free-thinking was more important than that of money or politics.

He loved to be European even if he was very attached to France and sustained the culture and art freely and boundlessly. He wished a similar destiny for the discipline of neurosurgery that he argued should be open in development worldwide.

"All arts are free and unlimited—neurosurgery is not. Neurosurgery is an ethical art...", these are the words he pronounced to start his presidential talk in Prague in 1992. When he retired, he continued to follow the progress of neurosurgery but was able to devote himself to other interesting activities with the same energy and personal investment as he did during his active medical career. He became a member of the "Académie des Sciences, Belles Lettres et Arts de Lyon" where he did many conferences in different fields, sometimes bringing together neurosurgery and pathology with painting or painters of the night or the Italian café...

He wrote a book "La Chapelle de l'Hôtel Dieu de Lyon" where he describes with enthusiasm and precision the treasures of this old monument.

For 25 years, I obtained his support and help at every occasion. All the time, I could benefit from his teaching, his generosity, his magnitude, and from his international recognition, which placed him in the 1990s as one of the most important neurosurgeons in the world.

His teaching has left many, many important principles. As a man, he was attached to honesty and to the respect of human dignity; to the respect of patients, children, adults, and their family. He thought that the work of a good neurosurgeon is not limited to skillful surgical procedures, but it also bears on taking care of patients and their disease entirely. As a neurosurgeon, his legacy is important for a large number of surgical procedures, for his surgical school

that he diffused everywhere in the world and which he elevated to high standards and that it will be difficult to maintain at the same level for his followers.

I am sure that all pupils that received his teaching will continue to work in his honor for the progress and development of neurosurgery and more particularly pediatric neurosurgery. Professor Lapras will remain forever not

only a great neurosurgeon but also a great man. He already entered the great world of neurosurgery.

For every person who knew him, it is now a sad moment difficult to fill.

To his wife Germaine, to Veronique, to Jerome, to Brigitte, to Nathalie, and to all the family, all our sincere condolences.