

Obituary

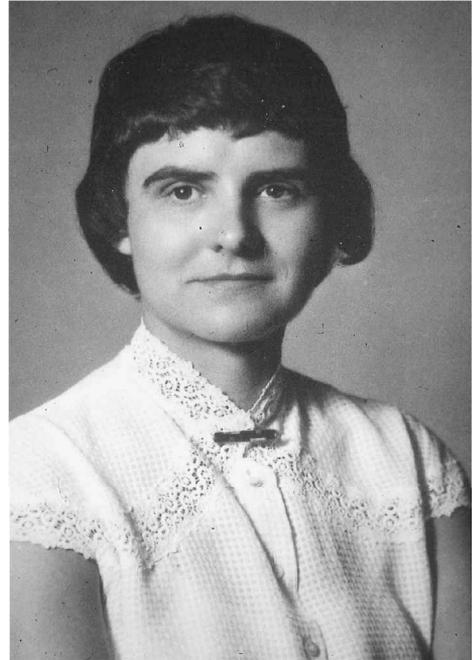
Dr Anna Blancquaert, 1922–2001

ANNA BLANQUAERT WAS BORN IN GENT, Belgium, on November 7, 1922. She was raised in an intellectual environment. Her father, professor of linguistics, became the Rector of the University of Gent. After Anna graduated from the Medical School of the University of Gent in 1951, she remained there to train in paediatrics under the guidance of Professor Carlos Hooft, then the most prominent paediatrician in Belgium. In 1955, Anna began her training in paediatric cardiology. This was undertaken at the University of Leiden, in the Netherlands, with Dr Caroline Bruins, who was already well known for her work in the management of congenital heart disease. Anna and Caroline subsequently became the very best of friends.

Anna realized that the geographical closeness of the medical centres in northern Europe was propitious for the arrangement of informal meetings between young doctors specializing in the developing field of paediatric cardiology. The initial meeting, which she convened in Brugge, Belgium, in 1961, was attended by only four paediatricians who were interested in treating children who had congenital cardiac defects. The meeting in Lille, France, held in 1962, attracted eight participants, while 11 attended the meeting arranged for 1963, organized in Lyon, France. For the meeting in Lyon, Anna had invited Dr Hamish Watson, a cardiologist from St Andrew's University in Scotland. Dr Watson subsequently accepted the honour of becoming the first president of what is now the Association for European Paediatric Cardiology. He immediately notified the presidents of different national organisations in cardiology and paediatrics about the formation of the new Association.

In 1964, the new Association met in Groningen, the Netherlands, at the invitation of Professor Klaas Bossina. More than 50 paediatric cardiologists from various European countries and the United States of America attended the meeting. Dr Helen Taussig gave the welcoming speech, in which she declared, "I am the mother of this Association".

From its beginnings, Anna wanted physicians from Eastern Europe and Russia to become part of the Association. She established good contacts with medical centres in the United States of America, and



invited non-European paediatric cardiologists from the United States, Canada, Australia, and Central and South America to become Corresponding Members of the Association. When Anna resigned as secretary-general in 1973, the then president, Klaas Bossina, presented her with a signet ring engraved with the logo of the Association.

Anna organized the meeting of the Association held in 1977 in Gent. As a token of friendship and appreciation, she invited her long-time friend Caroline Bruins to deliver the Mannheimer Lecture. Anna attended many meetings and presented papers, particularly on the results of banding of the pulmonary trunk in infants with large ventricular septal defects. Early on, she described the syndrome, originally known as "infantile idiopathic hypercalcemia", but now usually described in the names of Williams and Beuren. With Caroline Bruins and Bert De Vriendt, a nurse in the department of paediatrics at the University of Gent, Anna organized an association that established holiday camps for children with congenital heart defects and their parents.

Anna was professor of paediatrics in the subspecialty of paediatric cardiology at the University of Gent. In 1969, she became the first Belgian cardiologist to be elected a Fellow of the American College of Cardiology. At the end of 1973, she married Dr Bob Devloo, an anesthesiologist at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. She retired in 1982. Among her other honours, Anna was awarded the medals of Officer in the Leopold Order, and Great Officer in the Leopold II Order.

Anna died in Rochester, Minnesota, on August 18, 2001, of complications of Parkinson's disease. She will be remembered as a hard-working, clear-thinking person who was interested in helping others, and as a physician who was devoted to her small patients. She was competent and unassuming, two qualities that do not necessarily go together in the medical profession.

*Caroline Bruins
Claude Dupuis*