The Most Influential Scientists in the Development of Biomedicine (31) Francis Roger France (1941-2021)

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Honorary Fellow of the European Federation for Medical Informatics

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Francis Roger France, MD, MS, PhD, was born on 24 July 1941 in Brussels, Belgium (1-4).

He was Docteur en médecine, UCL, Master in Sciences in Biometry and Epidemiology, of University of Minnesota, Spécialiste en médecine interne et en gestion de données de santé, Agrégé de l’Enseignement Supérieur, UCL and Professeur Emérite de l’Université Catholique de Louvain. Also, Francis Roger was Consultant spécial Honoraire de la Commission Européenne, Professeur au Collège Belge de l’Académie Royale de Belgique, Founding Member of the International Academy of Health Sciences Informatics (IAHSI), Honorary Fellow of the European Federation for Medical Informatics, and finally he was Commandeur de l’Ordre de la Couronne Médaille civique de Première Classe veuf de Madame Anne-Marie Wouters (5, 6).

He graduated as MD at the Faculty of Medicine of the Catholic University of Louvain in 1967 and as MSc in Biometry (major) and Epidemiology (minor) in 1972 at the School of Public Health of the University of Minnesota. He was a postgraduate Research Fellow in the Unit of Health Computer Sciences headed by Professor Eugene Ackerman. He contributed to the Minnesota Coronary Survey initiated by Ancel Keys and Henry Backburn with his MS thesis entitled “An evaluation of Serum Lactate Dehydrogenase in a diet heart survey”. Between 1967 and 1972, he was trained in internal medicine in Louvain and at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. He graduated as PhD (Agrégation de l’Enseignement Supérieur) in Medicine at the University of Louvain in 1982 by defending a thesis on “The electronic Medical Record Summary, an indicator of performance and quality of care”. Between 1972 and 1982, he created a Medical Record Summary for all hospital inpatients, using coding standards, first in Belgium, then for all countries members of the European Union, called the MBDS (Minimum Basic Data Set). The linkage between a diagnostic information list with procedures and billing data by patient hospital stay allowed comparisons of length of stay, costs and results of care by groups of diagnoses. Dr Roger France was among the firsts to introduce the DRGs (Diagnosis Related Groups) in Europe. This model developed by Bob Fetter in the Yale School of Public Health was adopted as a new tool for financing and managing hospital care in Belgium by the Minister of Public Health Jean-Luc Dehaene in 1984. Professor F. Roger France was appointed as the Head of the Center for Medical Informatics (CIM), in
charge of the development of the electronic Health Record by patient in the new teaching hospital of the University of Louvain (Saint-Luc) in Brussels. The CIM was a research unit of the Department of Public Health, which explains why he could be elected by his pairs as President of the School of Public Health of the University of Louvain (1995-2001). He followed Baron Michel Lechat, well known epidemiologist and Robert Lauwerijis who contributed to industrial medicine. About 600 students from various countries were registered. It was the largest University School of Public Health in French language, with the largest number of DrPH theses. The public health program for developing countries was awarded the first prize by the Belgian Ministry for Cooperation to Development. Francis worked also as Associated Chief of service for General Internal Medicine in St-Luc Hospital (1988-2006) and as Head of the Medical Record Department. He was teacher of the first courses of medical informatics and of the evaluation of quality of care in Belgium. He initiated a course on Palliative and Continuous Care in collaboration with oncologists and ethicists. He was appointed as expert to the European Commission in the Biomedical Working Group chaired by Peter Reichertz in 1973 and as President of the AIM Requirements Board (1991) that led to a large number of international research and development EEC projects in Advanced Informatics in Medicine (AIM) and in eHealth. He participated to several projects and had a special interest for hospital management, medical record security, aid to medical diagnosis, quality of care and telemedicine. He has been President of scientific societies in health informatics (MIM in Belgium, EFMI in Europe) and Vice-President of IMIA. He worked as expert in public health for WHO, the Council of Europe, the World Bank and the EEC. He has been admitted as Professor Emeritus of the University of Louvain in 2006. Thereafter, he was invited as Professor to the “Collège Belgique” of the Royal Academy of Medicine in Belgium and Special Advisor to the European Commission (2013-2015).

When my book “Biographical Lexicon in Public Health”, English Edition was translated to Graek language three years ago Francis Roger France, as reviewer of English version sent me the letter with this text: “When opening your Public Health Lexicon in Greek, I was happy to see the picture of Henry Blackburn who was the Promotor of my M.S. Thesis in Public Health (Biometry, major, Epidemiology, minor) at the University of Minnesota in 1972. The “small world” of Public health and Information sciences pioneers owes you very much for your publication of their names and achievements that, otherwise would be quickly forgotten, like some names on pictures taken during scientific conferences. Thanks again for your work”

REFERENCES